

West of Scotland 26 Orkney 32.

Not many games of rugby are won if you play for only twenty minutes. West of Scotland had that confirmed as they fell to defeat in their opening league fixture of the season. Orkney had a game plan, albeit for only forty minutes, and deservedly took the four points for the win. Both sides received a try bonus point with West collecting the losing bonus point, finishing within seven points.

Even before the season had started, West had a much-depleted squad due to injuries. Losing one starting prop is a problem, losing both is a calamity. Pete Rhodes and Andrew Love both sustained injuries in pre-season and with first-choice hooker Connor Moran-Smith still building sandcastles, it was all hands to the pumps with Dylan Dawson at tight-head rather than in his more accustomed role at hooker. Adam Dunford, who made such a promising start in senior rugby last season, partnered Scott Cochrane in the second row, the skipper having recovered from the injury that saw him miss the end of last season. In the backs, Callum McCormack, outstanding last season, was another on the injury list with Ruaridh Cowan, on debut, replacing him. Another debutant, Scott Kelly, was on the bench.



Orkney kicked off in perfect conditions that promised much. It was, though, a very scrappy opening quarter. There was an early warning for West when they were penalised for collapsing at the first scrum of the match. Before ten minutes had gone, Orkney took one against the head, confirming their superiority in this facet of the game. They already

led by a Connor Hancock penalty goal after the referee had decided a West tackle was on the high side. We will see many of these decisions in the early stages of the season.

Orkney came closest to the first try when they were held up over the West line after a catch and drive from a line-out six metres out. The first quarter ended with the visitors being penalised for not straight at a line-out. It summed up the first twenty minutes. Very scrappy play from both sides with the ball being turned over repeatedly.

West finally did get on the scoreboard and took the lead after twenty-five minutes with a fine try by right wing Jack McCallum. West swept right with McCallum taking possession on halfway. He made ground before kicking ahead, into the Orkney in-goal area. McCallum outspurred the Orkney defence to touch down. It was the start of an excellent spell for the Burnbrae men in the period to half-time.

The first yellow card for a high tackle went to Orkney's hooker Scott Rendall just before the half-hour mark. Almost immediately, West extended their lead with a fine try. No 8 Grady Slater broke from inside his own half and found Nicky Sutcliffe in support. Cochrane appeared on the centre's shoulder before giving the return pass for Sutcliffe to score. Owen Hourston's successful conversion took the West lead to nine points.

Orkney almost closed the gap a minute before the interval but for the second time, were held up over the West line. That excellent defensive work got its reward as West cleared their lines before Sutcliffe broke from halfway, full back Lewis Howick supported and he in turn fed Callum Rutherford for the scrum-half to go under the posts. Hourston slotted the simple kick. West led by nineteen points to three with those two late tries, both out of the top drawer, leaving the Burnbrae crowd anticipating more to come in the second half.



What one anticipates and what one receives are two entirely different matters. It would be a second half which did not feature West on the front foot until the game was all but gone. They conceded for tries in a sixteen minute spell from the fiftieth minute. Replacement Duncan Gray found a gap in the West defence close to their line and had the simplest of tasks to go over under the posts. Hancock had an equally simple task from the tee. This was quickly followed by Scott Russell finishing off a catch and drive from a line-out five metres out. Orkney were now only four points adrift.

Just past the hour mark, the visitors would take the lead, a lead they would not relinquish. West had committed a number of offences and eventually Dawson would take the yellow card. The resulting penalty was kicked to five metres and again Orkney got full reward for the simplest of scores. They caught and they drove and they touched down, loose-head Nial Campbell being credited with the score. Less than five minutes later, they repeated the exercise with openside Craig Brough the scorer on this occasion.

Orkney led but by only six points. A converted try would give West the lead again but they had not been seen as an attacking force in the second half. In the opening forty minutes, West had taken possession in their opponents' half, turning the ball over as Orkney attacked from deep. They changed their tactics at the interval. They stopped running the ball but kicked long, into the West 22. Instead of doing likewise, West continued to try to run the ball back, invariably turning the ball over in their own half.

Six minutes were left when it was Aiden Drever's turn to finish off a catch and drive, this time from ten metres out. Hancock's conversion made it twenty-nine unanswered points in the second half. West did get the losing bonus point to add to their try bonus with three

minutes left after Drever was yellow-carded for a high tackle. A succession of penalties followed before a penalty try was awarded with scrum-half William Thomson following Drever to the touchline. West didn't threaten the Orkney line in the little time that remained.

A hugely disappointing afternoon for the Burnbrae men, particularly after such a promising second quarter of the match. The coaching staff has a lot to work on in training this week with the very tough journey to Pennypit Park to face Preston Lodge on Saturday. One element of the game they are sure to address is mouth discipline. On two occasions West were moved back ten yards for comments made to the referee. On the second occasion, this contributed to an Orkney try. Not good.