

First Win for West.

West of Scotland 33 Hamilton Bulls 12.

West of Scotland got their first win of the season on Saturday after an excellent performance against Hamilton Bulls at Burnbrae. Props Pete Rhodes and Andrew Love finally returned to the side after injury with hooker Connor Moran-Smith also back in the starting XV but at blindside flanker. The usual centre partnership of Rory Cuthbertson and Nicky Sutcliffe, both of whom missed the trip to Hughenden last week, were back in the line-up. Overhead conditions were fine but it was a soft surface meaning handling would be difficult.

Like West, Hamilton had lost their opening four league fixtures. They had, though, scored at least thirty points in all four games, taking four try and three losing bonus points. West would have a tough task on their hands against a physically imposing side. Remarkably, after sixteen minutes, the Burnbrae side was sixteen points ahead. Two early Dru Nicholson penalty goals set them on course before Callum McCormack's excellent try in the eleventh minute. His break, down the right wing, was supported by Rory Cuthbertson. The centre took McCormack's inside pass before returning for the winger to go clear and score. Nicholson's conversion attempt was successful. Five minutes later, the stand-off slotted his fourth kick of the afternoon after the visitors were penalised for a high tackle.



It had been clear from the early scrums that the return of the experienced Rhodes and Love was making a difference. Just past the mid-point of the half, Hamilton got the put in at a scrum under the West posts. It was the perfect attacking position. The home eight, though, drove their opponents backwards and the penalty was awarded enabling West to clear their lines.

Hamilton brought themselves back into the match after half an hour. It was a simple score. From a line-out ten metres from the West line, the forwards drove. The ball was eventually moved left to Scott Shankie. His pop-up pass

allowed his centre partner Andrew Wilson to go over unchallenged. Wilson added the extras.

West quickly restored their sixteen points advantage after more excellent work from the pack. Hamilton had the put in at a scrum six metres from their own line. Again they were driven back. Home scrum half Callum Rutherford was able to pick up and force his way over. Nicholson's fifth success from five attempts from the tee gave a half-time score of West of

Scotland 23 Hamilton Bulls 7. West certainly deserved their lead but the game was by no means over.

Trailing by sixteen points, Hamilton had to score first in the second half. They put West under tremendous pressure in their 22 from the restart. Some excellent defence held the line but not all of it was to the referee's liking. After five penalties in quick succession were awarded to the visitors, West openside Donnie Morrison was the recipient of a "team yellow". Hamilton tapped the last of these penalties. There was more resolute defence from the home side before left wing Andrew Crawford found a gap to score in the corner.

Fifteen minutes into the half, Stuart Murray replaced Love in the West front row. Murray would be an excellent substitute. Hamilton had dominated the first twenty minutes of the second half but had only that Crawford try to show for it. A West weakness this season has been poor discipline. It almost cost them again. Someone disagreed with the referee's (correct) ruling that a pass was forward. A penalty was awarded on halfway allowing Hamilton to kick to touch on the home 22. The catch and drive took the visitors five metres from the line before Morrison ripped possession and the danger was cleared.



Ten minutes were left when West extended their lead, all down to good work by Jack McCallum. The right wing's pace allowed him to chase a kick into the Hamilton half, forcing his opponent to hold on. Nicholson converted from thirty metres. West put themselves in touching distance of a try bonus with eight minutes left on the clock. After the pack drove into the Hamilton half, Nicholson punted over the uprushing defence. Sutcliffe outjumped the last defender to gather cleanly and head to the line. Nicholson was successful yet again with his kick. Seven attempts, seven successes, eighteen points. West skipper Scott Cochrane had had a superb game, his barging runs gaining yards every time he carried. He came close to getting that try bonus before being brought down in the Hamilton 22. That was as close as West came. There was no more scoring.

The Burnbrae youngsters have not let the club down in any way in the opening games of the season. They were missing the experienced heads and they returned on Saturday. It made the difference. Three tries were scored but just as important was the defence against a side who have scored so freely this season.

Next Saturday, West make the short journey to Bishopbriggs to face Allan Glen's in what will be a tough encounter. Kick-off is at three o'clock. West of Scotland Ladies will host Ayr Ladies at two o'clock on Sunday.