

## Vital Win for West

### West of Scotland 38 Dumfries Saints 20.

A vital try bonus point victory for West of Scotland in a match that wasn't won until the final ten minutes. It took West to within a point of their opponents and three and four points respectively ahead of Hamilton Bulls and Cartha Queens Park at the bottom of National League Division three.



Head coach Trevor Carmichael, as ever, had to juggle with his playing resources. Although the first-choice front row of Pete Rhodes, Hamish Clark and Andrew Love returned, injury victims stand-off Dru Nicholson and wing Jack McCallum are likely to be missing for some time. Flanker Donald Morrison was absent, too, through injury. Hopefully, he will soon be back. Prop Stuart

Murray, who has performed admirably in the absence of Rhodes, was another on the sidelines. Max Bowie moved to openside and skipper Scott Cochrane to No 8 with Connor Fleming coming in to form a youthful second row partnership with Adam Dunford. Owen Hourston returned at stand-off and Martin Wallace on the right wing.

Although the playing surface was, not surprisingly, on the soft side, conditions were otherwise perfect. Dumfries were first on the scoreboard with a simple penalty from Keir Paterson after West were ruled guilty of a high tackle on their own 22. It was the first of a number of similar awards throughout the eighty minutes. West ignored this early setback and began to play some excellent rugby. Blindside Connor Moran-Smith got the touch down after a catch and drive from a line-out on the Dumfries five metres line, Lewis Howick adding the conversion. The full back then finished off an excellent move involving backs and forwards. From a scrum on the visitors' ten metres line, the pack drove deep into Dumfries territory before Howick came into the line to take the miss pass and go round the last man to score. He added the extras from the tee. Two minutes later, inside centre Rory Cuthbertson's try and Howick's third conversion extended West's lead to eighteen points. From a line-out ten metres out, the pack drove, the ball was moved left and Cuthbertson found the gap. Twenty-three minutes gone and West were looking very comfortable.

Any thoughts the home support had that an easy victory would be had were quickly put on hold. Lock Declan O'Donnell's try after he picked up at the back of the ruck when the West defence held up the Dumfries pack on their line, Paterson converting, was quickly followed by West losing hooker Hamish Clark for ten minutes, a yellow card being awarded when the referee decided he had been guilty of a dangerous tackle. Clark did look rather unfortunate as it appeared his opponent had been trying to roll out of the tackle. Dumfries were quick to take advantage of the extra man, centre Ben Radley crossing after a tap penalty in the home 22, Paterson converting. The gap was down to four points with the visitors looking likely to move into the interval with a lead. It was West, though, who would score again and secure their try bonus point, Scott Cochrane going over in the corner after a long pass took out the cover defence. It was a deserved score for the West skipper who had an outstanding eighty minutes. There was still time for Paterson to kick a penalty goal after West were penalised again for a high tackle. At half-time, West lead by twenty-six points to twenty. There had been too many errors on both sides for it to be a great game but it was fine entertainment for the spectators.



The opening ten minutes of the second half belonged to West. Solid Dumfries defence held up a forward drive on the line but it was not long before the Burnbrae men extended their lead. It was a score Dumfries would have been disappointed with. From their line-out ten metres from their own line they lost possession. West gathered and Nicky Sutcliffe powered over. Much like the first period, Dumfries then dominated for a spell but the West defence held firm.

On the hour mark, outside centre Sutcliffe, such a vital part with fellow centre Cuthbertson of this West side, was forced to retire. Left wing Callum McCormack moved inside with Fraser Hamilton coming on to make his debut. Andrew Love then left with Clark moving to tight-head and Charlie Townsend coming on to hook. These enforced changes did not help the West cause but the defence continued to hold strong. Eventually they did get into their opponents' half, indeed they were held up over the line. It was from the restart that West sealed their win. Howick collected the clearance kick on halfway before using his pace to go outside his man, draw the last defender and give a perfectly timed pass to the supporting McCormack who went under the posts. Howick's conversion rounded off the scoring. Adam Young replaced Adam Dunford before Ross Dobbin became the second debutant of the afternoon, replacing Moran-Smith.

A vital win for West with another huge match next Saturday. They visit Dumbreck to face bottom of the table Cartha Queen's Park. Kick-off will be at the later time of four o'clock.

West of Scotland: Lewis Howick; Martin Wallace, Nicky Sutcliffe, Rory Cuthbertson, Callum McCormack; Owen Hourston, Callum Rutherford; Pete Rhodes, Hamish Clark, Andrew Love; Connor Fleming, Adam Dunford; Connor Moran-Smith, Max Bowie, Scott Cochrane.

Replacements: Charlie Townsend, Ross Dobbin, Adam Young, Fraser Hamilton.