

Dylan, Draughts and Defeat. Orkney 50 West of Scotland 24.

Orkney Rugby Football Club is one of the best clubs in Scotland to visit and Saturday's trip to the Picakaquoy Centre was business as usual. The game was played in fine spirit, beers and many other alcoholic beverages were consumed. It was a splendid evening.....until the early hours, far from the rugby club.

It was an unsavoury incident. The West man involved was queuing to be sick outside a kebab retailer's place of business. Without warning, he was "pushed by an Orcadian" (his words). It drew an immediate and justified (his word) response. One has one's reputation to uphold. No photographer was present but we do have an artist's impression of The Bespectacled Enforcer's retaliation:



This unwarranted attack clearly affected the West man as he was still moaning about it to anyone who would listen (no one) as the squad stood at baggage reclaim at Glasgow Airport some fifteen hours later.

The trip had started well, particularly for Dog who had his third pre-flight beer, aerophobia is a curse, purchased for him by what he considered a "hen party". It was suggested he get the name of the care home and write a letter of thanks to the matron. In what would be a weekend of whole new experiences for some of the younger members of the squad, one did discover why a bloke stands under the wingtip when passengers are boarding an aircraft.

It was always going to be a tough task for West facing an unbeaten Orkney side on their own ground. So it proved but yet another try bonus point moved the Burnbrae side that little bit further away from the National Division 3 relegation battle. Indeed, having trailed 0-28 at the interval, West "won" the second half when they could so easily have crumpled to a very heavy defeat.

The West line-up saw Josh Davey make his debut at stand off and lock Ross Dobbin his first start. Pete Rhodes moved to blindside with Stuart Murray returning at loose-head. Veteran Dylan Dawson provided front row cover from the bench. Gareth Hopkins' international

clearance was finally received and he, too, was named as a replacement. So, too, was Darren Allan, another long-term injury victim.

The game was over as a contest by half-time. The home side completely dominated the opening period. Alex Kansour's try after a forward drive, converted by Connor Hancock, gave Orkney an early lead. From the restart, hooker Scott Rendall, one of the most outstanding forwards in the division, broke from his 22. The West defence bought a huge dummy before Rendall fed Chris Guthrie. The left wing broke two tackles before scoring. Guthrie looks a very good player, tall and powerfully built with good pace. Hancock was again successful from the tee.

This is a very good, very much improved Orkney side. Their fitness level is clearly something they have addressed. West did not leave their own 22 in the opening quarter. When they did finally get some possession, the home defence was solid. Indeed, Orkney extended their lead on the half hour. Lock Liam Moar finished off after a tapped penalty on the West 22. Hancock added the extras. The excellent Rendall secured the try bonus just before the interval, taking a pop-up pass from a ruck close to the West line. Hancock kicked his fourth conversion. The half-time score did not flatter Orkney.

West narrowed the gap early in the second half. From a line-out, Nicky Sutcliffe came on the crash ball to score under the posts. Davey had a simple conversion. Sutcliffe was forced to withdraw to be replaced by Allan. Before the West defence could reorganise, centre Marcus Guthrie went through some weak tackles to score. Hancock converted. Chris Guthrie extended his side's lead on the hour, looping to score in the right corner after good support work between backs and forwards.

Allan's try with ten minutes left put the try bonus in West's sights before Lewis Howick came into the line to score in the corner. Eight minutes remained. Two minutes were lost as Hancock kicked a simple penalty goal but West finally got that all important fourth try. Left wing Callum McCormack came on the loop as the ball went across the backs with McCormack just getting in in the corner. A fine score. Davey converted. William Thomson's try and Hancock's conversion were the final acts of the game.

The Burnbrae side were well beaten but did take positives from the game. Davey had an excellent debut, Adam Young continues to impress in the back row. The inexperienced second row partnership of Dobbin and Connor Fleming did not take a backward step at any time.

Everyone retired to the bar, drink was taken and Ross Wilson was apparently presented with two slabs of lager for what must have been recognition, by Orkney, of his ability with flag in hand. Well, Ross thought they had been presented to him. Some of the younger members of the squad were introduced by some of the older members of the Orkney squad to the game of "draughts". Not, as they, thought, a game involving two different sets of counters and leaping and doubling but one that involved drink, one that brought great amusement for the senior members of the Orkney squad. For the West youngsters, it started an evening that would involve some climbing walls, one discovering what a causeway is and one collecting sick bags on the homeward flight.

Next Saturday, West host top of the table Preston Lodge. It will be every bit as difficult as the trip to Kirkwall. Kick-off at Burnbrae will be at two o'clock.

West of Scotland: Lewis Howick; Jack McCallum, Nicky Sutcliffe, Rory Cuthbertson, Callum McCormack; Josh Davey, Calum Rutherford; Stuart Murray, Hamish Clark, Andrew Love; Ross Dobbin, Connor Fleming; Pete Rhodes, Adam Young, Scott Cochrane.

Replacements: Dylan Dawson, Callum Godber, Darren Allan, Gareth Hopkins.