

## That's Entertainment! Howe of Fife 59 West of Scotland 41

With neither promotion nor relegation at stake, this promised to be a typical "end of season" encounter. What the very healthy crowd witnessed was eighty minutes of club rugby at its best with no fewer than fifteen tries for them to enjoy. It was another away defeat for West of Scotland but the young Burnbrae side left the Duffus Park pitch with their heads held high.

With Callum McCormack added to the extensive injury list, Fraser Brand made a long-awaited return. Neither Brand nor any of his teammates had touched the ball before Howe of Fife got the opening score of the afternoon. Howe collected their own kick-off and after going through the phases, outside centre Duncan McIntyre went over in the corner. Dom Martin slotted an excellent conversion from close to the right touchline. Lewis Howick's simple penalty goal reduced the deficit but before ten minutes had been played, the home side scored two more tries. After a forward drive to the West line, No 8 Fraser Allan took a pop-up to go under the posts before loose-head Euan Bisset finished off good linking work between backs and forwards. Martin, an impressive kicker, converted both.



West have suffered some painful defeats over the years on their visits to Cupar and another miserable afternoon looked in prospect for the travelling support. The Burnbrae youngsters thought otherwise. Two tries in a five minute spell narrowed the gap to four points. Adam Dunford got West's first try of the game, the lock touching down after a catch and drive from a line-out close to the home line. This was followed by an excellent score. Rory Cuthbertson's break set up the ruck inside the Howe 22, before the ball was switched right through the backs. Jack McCallum stepped inside his opposite number to find the gap to go over. Howick continued the

good day for the kickers, converting both tries.

Rory Johnstone extended the Howe lead again, the tight-head breaking from a ruck to barrel his way over, Martin adding the extras. Howe had secured their try bonus point after only twenty-three minutes. Two yellow cards in six minutes added to West's woes. Andrew Love looked rather unfortunate to get his card for what the referee adjudged to be a high tackle. Elliot Weir then followed, taking a "team yellow" after being caught offside, the latest in a number of offences. The home side quickly took advantage of the depleted West numbers, moving further ahead when full back Eden Cruickshank came into the line to create the overlap for Luke Connah to score in the left corner. Martin's attempted conversion struck the crossbar. Still the West heads did not go down. Driven on by the very impressive Adam

Young, it was the returning Brand who would get his side's third try. The wing intercepted a Howe pass forty metres out and, harbouring no thoughts of using the support inside him, sailed in to score. Howick was again successful from the tee. Just as West had got that bit closer, their opponents restored their sixteen points lead again. It was a good try, play going through numerous phases before lock Will Hodgkins forced his way over. Martin's kick gave a remarkable half-time score of Howe of Fife 40 West of Scotland 24. Howe had been much the dominant side but West had taken the chances that came their way.

West were first to score in the second half, through Connor Moran-Smith, the hooker finishing off another catch and drive move and securing the try bonus. Howick's kick struck the upright. West were still a man down at this stage. Just before the hour mark, Hodgkins recorded his second score of the game, breaking a couple of weak tackles to go over, Martin adding the two points. West then had the man advantage after home lock Jamie Thomson was yellow-carded for a high tackle. Martin Wallace had replaced Brand and it was the veteran who would finish off some excellent handling across the backline. Howick took his personal tally with the boot to eleven points. The full back then set up the try of the game. Taking a Howe clearance kick on his own ten metres line, Howick quickly made ground, going outside his opponent before finding support. Darren Allan was the one to finish off an excellent piece of rugby.



West were within six points with victory now possible. That hope was ended when the outstanding McIntyre scored after Howe went long at a line-out on the West ten metres line. A losing bonus point was still within the visitors' grasp and they came so close to it after great link work between backs and forwards. The ball, though, was turned over close to the home line and from there, Howe made ground before Cruickshank took possession to score. Martin's seventh successful kick was followed by the whistle for no side.

Both sides left the field to great applause with all in the stand on their feet. The young West forwards take great credit for never taking a backward step with Dunford and Weir outstanding at lock. Calum Beckers and Robert Sykes had excellent games in the back row with Young West's man of the match.

West of Scotland: Lewis Howick; Jack McCallum, Nicky Sutcliffe, Darren Allan, Fraser Brand; Rory Cuthbertson, Callum Rutherford; Hamish Clark, Connor Moran-Smith, Andrew Love, Adam Dunford, Elliot Weir; Adam Young, Calum Beckers, Robert Sykes.

Replacements: Gus Cameron, Stuart Murray, Josh Davey, Martin Wallace.

West have one league fixture left, at Dumfries Saints on 16 March. On 9 March, West will host Allan Glen's in the first round of the National League Cup. Kick-off will be three o'clock.