

More Promise As The Season Closes

Dumfries Saints 37 West of Scotland 28

Another defeat to end West of Scotland's season but again there was much to take from the game with the Burnbrae youngsters getting more experience of playing at National League level. The injury jinx continued, though, when for the second week running, a player was lost to injury in the warm-up, Cammy Finlayson being the unfortunate victim on this occasion.

West kicked-off with the advantage of a stiffish breeze on a surface that would test the leg muscles. Keir Patterson's penalty goal, a simple chance from twenty metres, gave Dumfries an early lead. West were quick to respond. Openside Emin Thaqi came on the crash ball from a line-out five metres out to force his way over. Lewis Howick has kicked well all season and he made no mistake from the tee. The lead was quickly extended to eleven points after Nicky Sutcliffe's boot gave West the line-out from a 50/22. West moved the ball right, the overlap was created and Sutcliffe got his reward, finishing off the move. Howick again converted.

The Burnbrae side had had much the better of the opening quarter but their hosts narrowed the gap after Howick was the recipient of a yellow card. The full back seemed somewhat unfortunate as the referee awarded the penalty for the player being off his feet at the breakdown. Dumfries settled for the scrum, to make use of their physical advantage. It proved to be the correct decision as they drove their opponents back to the line before No 8 Ryan Cruickshank touched down. Patterson got the extras. West were quick to respond with a fine try. Jack McCallum broke to the home 22 before play went right. Good Dumfries defence forced West to move left again, creating the gap for Sutcliffe to go in in the corner for his second score of the afternoon. With Howick still off the field, stand-off Owen Hourston slotted home an excellent kick from the touchline. At the interval, West led by 21-10. So far, so good although it was at this point tight-head Andrew Love was forced to retire through injury.

The first score of the second half was going to be vital. It was Dumfries who got it within thirty seconds of the restart. Howick's clearance kick was charged down, the veteran Martin Wallace recovered possession but was isolated and penalised for holding on. The quick tap saw Dumfries take advantage of a wide gap in the West defence, centre Fergus Clanachan scoring with ease. Patterson had a simple conversion and he followed this a few minutes later with his second penalty goal to bring his side within a point of West. Two minutes later, they took the lead. Full back Jack Steele had looked dangerous with ball in hand throughout and when he broke into the West half, he found his forwards providing good support. Lock Harry Houldey finished it off before Patterson added the conversion.

It had been a bad ten minutes for the Burnbrae side but their heads did not go down. They were quick to regain the lead with another fine try. Sutcliffe's break was supported by McCallum and then Howick who was held up just short. From the ruck, Adam Dunford picked up and sent in Connor Moran-Smith. Howick's kick recovered the single point lead. Yet again the lead changed hands, a lead Dumfries, this time, would not relinquish. After the

pack drove into the visitors' 22, Clanachan came on the crash ball to break a couple of weak tackles and score. Patterson converted. Before the game restarted, West were forced into using their remaining two substitutions after Sutcliffe and McCallum were forced off by injuries.

With ten minutes left, West No 8 Donnie Morrison received a yellow card after he suggested the match official had given an incorrect interpretation of the laws of the game. Patterson's third penalty goal took the losing bonus point away from West before the home side's loosed-head prop Callum Higgins was the third player to be yellow-carded, on this occasion for a high tackle.

It was hugely frustrating for the young West side to leave with no reward for their efforts. It was a match they could have won. It has been a dreadful season in terms of injuries for West and eighth place is no mean achievement for a side with so many in their first term of senior rugby.

The party returned to Glasgow, having taken on fuel, a generous proportion of which had been funded on behalf of the club by the Vice-President (Senior Rugby). He proved he still retains a player's instinct by consuming a more than generous proportion. In the clubhouse, with the season over, the remaining members of the party drank with the shackles off. Dr Hopkins entertained with some tales from the, eh, coalface, putting one or two of the younger members of the squad off women for life. Tabes recorded his sprinting feats at primary school on his Tinder account. There had been no response by the time this correspondent departed.

Thanks to every player who has provided such entertainment this year, many at the cost of injury. Thanks to Trevor Carmichael and fellow coaches. Thanks to Jenny and the physio team.

Now let's get the Ladies back to Murrayfield.

West of Scotland: Lewis Howick; Jack McCallum, Nicky Sutcliffe, Gareth Hopkins, Martin Wallace; Owen Hourston, Callum Rutherford; Stuart Murray, Connor Moran-Smith, Andrew Love; Adam Dunford, Connor Fleming; Calum Beckers, Emin Thaqi, Donald Morrison.

Replacements: Ryan Hope, Calum Don, Cameron Loudon, Cammy Finlayson.