

## **West Heads Held High.**

West of Scotland Ladies first group match in the Sarah Beaney Cup saw them travel to face Premier Division Stirling County at Bridgehaugh. It looked like a tough afternoon was in prospect for a side in its first season in the National Division. The continued absence of Ellie Williamson through injury and the unavailability of Anna Campbell saw Alex Watson move into the second row with Fi Gassner at No 8 and the versatile Hannah Foster-Rain at open side.

West made an excellent start, their usual open brand of rugby being rewarded with a try by Watson after only seven minutes. It was her twentieth try of the season, a remarkable effort by the forward. Alexa Smith slotted home the conversion. It took the hosts five minutes to reply. Inside centre Rachel Shankland, outstanding throughout, finished off good work by the County backs after West had lost possession in their own 22.

The home side had been guilty of several technical infringements in the opening stages. It eventually led to stand off Beth Streets receiving a "team" yellow card. West could not take advantage of their opponents' reduced numbers and it was County who moved ahead, full back Neve Henderson benefiting from some poor West defence to score. Shankland converted. The Bridgehaugh side was now dominating and they would score two further tries before half-time through lock Sarah Murdoch, converted by Shankland, and Shankland herself. County led 24-7 at the interval.

Any real hopes West had of getting back into the match were killed almost immediately on the restart when County loose head Ailsa Luke powered over after another fine break by Shankland. There was no sign of West folding and they hit back when blind side Amanda Paterson was alert to take a quick tap penalty five metres from the home line to score. Smith was again successful with the conversion. Heather Davis was next on the scoresheet for County, the open side collecting a long pass to score in the right corner. West were doing some wonderful work in defence with left wing Rachael Millar, in particular, noticeable with some outstanding tackling. Shankland completed her hat-trick and her side's scoring with fifteen minutes left. The Burnbrae side kept battling and got a third, well deserved score just before the end when scrum half Aimee Watson crossed in the corner after another quickly taken tap penalty. The match finished Stirling County Ladies 39 West of Scotland Ladies 19.

The West coaching team must have been happy with their side's performance and refusal to give up when the game was clearly lost. County is an established top flight club, a provider of players to the international side. The young West side will have taken a great deal from the game and move into their next match with confidence. They will face Heriot's Blues at Burnbrae on 13 March, kick-off two o'clock.

West of Scotland Ladies: Eilidh Power; Lucy Gardner, Jade Scott, Emily Irving, Rachael Millar; Alexa Smith, Aimee Watson; Amy McHenry, Rachel Morrison, Natasha Burge; Erinn Foley, Alex Watson; Amanda Paterson, Hannah Foster-Rain, Fiona Gassner. Replacements: Pamela Duffy, Errin Hendry-Giles, Shona Garry, Ashley Blair, Caitlin Reilly, Mhairi Mack, Rebecca Francis.

