

West Ladies' Good Start Continues.

West of Scotland Ladies 48 Wigtownshire Ladies 17.

The birds were sleeping off lunch in the trees surrounding West of Scotland's Burnbrae ground. All was quiet and serene in their world high above the human contest on the ground below. Suddenly, West through Wilson's second score of the game and the historic Burge moment, that try converted by Smith their peace was broken by an enormous roar. As one, they took to the skies as the noise that disturbed them from their slumbers continued. At pitch level, Natasha Burge found herself lying on top of a rugby ball. She was positioned between her opponents' try line and dead ball-line. She had heard the referee's whistle blow and the roar of the spectators. What had she done wrong? Would that nice Mr Matheson, her coach, be upset with her? Again? For most of her life, Natasha had been a front row forward. Like most of that ilk, she didn't pay much attention to the laws of rugby union. She grunted and she shunted, she supported and she tackled. She lifted in the line-out and she pushed in the scrum. Law 8.2 in particular had been of no concern. The scoring of a try. Scottish Rugby's records only go back to season 2018/19. This was Natasha's forty-third start since then for West Ladies. Today she was playing at loose-head prop for the twenty-third time. She had also appeared at tight-head on thirteen occasions, five times at lock and twice as hooker. In addition, eleven times she had come off the bench as an impact (sic) player. Fifty-four times she had pulled on the West shirt, not once had Tash experienced the apparent high that floats the boats of the backs when they touch down. The reaction of her teammates and an opponent's despairing cry of, "Definitely time to chuck it" quickly told the prop what had happened. She would have celebrated if she had known what to do.

West had got off to the perfect start. Receiving the ball from the kick-off in their 22, it seemed every member of the side handled the ball as they progressed with pace to the Wigtownshire line. Halted eventually just short when the visitors were penalised for coming in from the side at the ruck, a quick tapped penalty saw tighthead Vanessa Reid-Phelps power over. Remarkably, they almost repeated the score from the restart, Wigtownshire on this occasion scrambling the ball into touch two yards short of their line.

West were playing some splendid rugby and deservedly moved further ahead through Jade Scott, the centre scoring in typical style after more good phase rugby. Alexa Smith converted. Just past the quarter hour mark, Diane Wilson took the lead to seventeen points, the No 8 finishing off another fine handling move. Pass and support, pass and support was clearly the order of the day and the try bonus point was secured on the half hour mark through Anna Campbell. It was the lock's first score since her return from Orkney. The game was certainly finished as a contest a few minutes later when scrum half Katie Wilson burrowed over from close range. At half-time, West led by twenty-nine points to nil after a first period of excellent team rugby their opponents could not match. The passing was crisp, support runners were always there. Rachel Morrison, starting the season at blindside flanker, was finding with ease large gaps in the Wigtownshire defence. It is a moot point whether this was down to Mo's electrifying pace or the opposition players trying to avoid a dry-cleaning bill. (How do you remove diced carrot stains?)

Ten minutes into the second half, the entertainment for the afternoon was really over. West through Wilson's second score of the game and the historic Burge moment, that try converted by Smith, saw West forty-one points clear. Injuries had reduced Wigtownshire to fourteen players with West deciding to withdraw a player to match up. West used their bench and play became a bit scrappy. Good work by the powerful Wigtownshire pack saw tries from lock Iona Brisbane, converted by Kaylin Young, and Isla Campbell. Young was easily the visitors outstanding player.

In the last quarter of the match, Scott would record her second try, Smith again successful from the tee, before Young finished the scoring for the day. The sides retired to the bar for pies and pints and Burge was chosen West's Player of the Match by her teammates. It still didn't get them a drink from the prop to celebrate her try. "I'm driving". (Ross Wilson would have been proud of that one.) Katie Wilson was selected by Wigtownshire as their West PotM.

The Burnbrae side played some excellent rugby in the first half, the coach could not have asked for more from a much-depleted side. Next Sunday, West face Cartha Queen's Park at Dumbreck. The home side will be looking for revenge for their Murrayfield defeat in last season's National Shield Final. Kick-off is two o'clock.

Thanks to Bex Francis for carrying out physio duties for both sides, not for the first time.

West of Scotland Ladies: Bex Francis; Tiia Stevenson-Cook, Jade Scott, Laura Martin, Rachael Millar; Alex Smith, Katie Wilson; Natasha Burge, Alice Masson, Vanessa Reid-Phelps, Anna Campbell, Louise Skilling; Rachel Morrison, Holly Macdonald, Louise Wilson.
Replacements: Niamh Farrell Lewer, Ashley Blair, Caitlin Reilly, Megan Scullion.