

## West U-18 Come So Close

The last act of this superb National Youth Under-18 Cup Final, Greg Anderson's conversion of Liam McConnell's match-winning try, was noticed only by the kicker and the stadium announcer. To all others present, it was lost in quite distinct seas of joy and despair. It was probably fitting the Boroughmuir flanker got the winning score. He had been outstanding throughout, a deserved recipient of the Man of the Match accolade. It was a match, though, neither side deserved to lose but both deserved to win. West of Scotland had matched the heavy favourites.

Boroughmuir got off to the perfect start. Turning the ball over on the West 22, they moved the ball right and McConnell crashed over. Scrum half Anderson added the conversion. Anderson's penalty made it 10-0 after only five minutes. The Edinburgh side was dominating possession with left wing Ozzy Canakaivata looking a dangerous runner, if somewhat less efficient under the high ball. A one-sided final looked on the cards but a fine try by Patrick Spence brought the Milngavie side back into the match. After a tap penalty on the Boroughmuir 22, Spence's perfectly timed intrusion saw him reduce the deficit. Charlie Greaves' conversion narrowed the gap to three points.



Centre Nick Adler was in support of hooker Jerry Blyth-Lafferty's break from halfway to score Boroughmuir's second try, again converted by Anderson. At the mid-point of the half, the Edinburgh side deserved their lead, the forwards providing plenty of good ball for their backs. West were having to defend well and this they did. Their tremendous work was rewarded when after repeated drives after a tap penalty close to their opponents' line, skipper Kerr Yule scored. Greaves was again successful with the conversion. From

the kick-off, West almost took the lead when a kick ahead crossed the Boroughmuir line. The one Boroughmuir defender got to the ball just before the two chasing West players. Greaves simple penalty from in front of the posts brought the sides level at 17-17. It had been a breathtaking first half.

There was almost a sensational start to the second half. Boroughmuir turned the ball over on their own line and broke. It ended with Adler being brought down in the West 22. It was from a similar situation Boroughmuir regained the lead with just over ten minutes left of what had been an enthralling second period. After another turnover on their line, they broke left and with numbers over, Canakaivata scored in the left corner. Anderson made light of the difficult conversion. West then seemed to find another gear. The forwards drove, the backs attacked. Boroughmuir were forced into desperate defence as West set up phase after phase on their opponents' line. Eventually the dam was breached as Yule dived over a pile of bodies and his colleagues celebrated. The referee consulted his assistant before awarding the try. Greaves levelled the score at 24-24.

And so to the final five minutes. The scores were level, the try count was level, the same number of goals had been kicked. No cards had been issued in a match played in an excellent spirit. It appeared the trophy would be shared. Boroughmuir were awarded a penalty. It looked kickable for a man who had looked sure from the tee all game but Anderson's skipper indicated a kick to touch. Boroughmuir had had the advantage at the line-out throughout. They caught the ball and drove and drove but the West defence held firm and cleared. A scrum was awarded to Boroughmuir on the West ten metres line and the clock went to red. From the scrum, McConnell collected. Showing remarkable pace after such a physically demanding match, he found a gap in the defence and powered through under the posts. His teammates danced with him, the West men slumped to their knees. What a game of rugby. Every player, coach and official gave his all. A wonderful advert for youth rugby in Scotland and almost the perfect end to Head of Rugby Development Millan Browne's time at West of Scotland. What a legacy he has left.

