

West Back Joint Top

On a Greenock afternoon straight from central casting, West of Scotland had to dig deep against a Greenock Wanderers side whose performance belied their league position. It was a grim battle for long periods of the game before the visitors secured another try bonus win, by 28-13. With Gordonians failing to take a try bonus in their 20-15 win at home to Hillhead-Jordanhill, West go back joint top with the Aberdeen side ahead on points difference.

Rowland Osii returned after a long absence to the left wing, replacing the injured Callum McCormack. In the pack, Gareth Craig took Dylan Matthews place in the second row with Fraser Smeaton taking over from Marc Zoma at blindside flanker. The game began in a traditional Greenock downpour and continued in what has become a West tradition, falling foul of the match official. Conceding penalties has been a major issue for the Burnbrae men all season. It was from the fifth award, after only thirteen minutes, the hosts went ahead, centre Jack McDaid making light of the conditions with his kick.



West were behind for less than five minutes. From a line-out on the home 22, the pack drove their opponents back to their five metres line, the ball was recycled for scrum half Jamie Carruth to score. Cammy Finlayson converted. Any thought the visitors had of extending their lead and having a comfortable afternoon were soon dispelled. A second penalty conversion by McDaid was quickly followed by a fine try. Left wing Michael Frizzel came into the line and reached the West 22 before finding his support runners. It was tight-head Louie

Hoodless who would get the score. McDaid's conversion put Wanderers six points ahead. In terms of possession, it was a deserved lead.

A Wanderers error led to West regaining the lead just past the half hour mark. After West had been held-up over the home line, the drop goal restart went straight into touch. From the resulting five metres scrum, West drove over and No 8 John Vasconcelos touched down. Finlayson's second successful conversion of the game gave his side a one point lead at the interval. They were ahead but the ten penalties conceded must have featured in coach Andy Douglas' half-time talk.

It took West but two minutes of the second half to extend their lead when Nicky Sutcliffe easily brushed off two poor attempts at a tackle to go in from almost half-way. Finlayson converted again. It took West but eight minutes of the second half to take their tally of penalties conceded to fifteen. This allowed the home side to remain in the game. Good attacking positions were lost to the referee's whistle. The try bonus point was secured,

though, when veteran loose-head Pete Rhodes finished off a simple catch and drive from a line-out a few metres from the Wanderers line. Finlayson made it four out of four with the boot to complete a successful afternoon for the stand-off.

There were still twenty-five minutes left to play but only two real chances were carved out in the remaining time. A West 50/22 gave hope of a repeat of their fourth score but the ball was knocked on at the line out. Rory Cuthbertson hacked on over the home line but was just beaten to the touch down by the covering defence. The West defence gave little away and never really looked like letting their opponents back into the game in the closing stages. West were down to fourteen and then thirteen men in the final seven minutes. Nicky Sutcliffe looked most unfortunate to receive a straight red for what the referee ruled to be a tip tackle.



Fraser Smeaton took what was the almost inevitable team yellow after a deliberate knock on with a couple of minutes left. The whistle blew for No Side, five league points were secured and the push from promotion was still on.

A surprisingly good number of spectators ventured out on a dreadful day. The West element of the crowd would have enjoyed their afternoon, the home members less so. Next Saturday, West travel to Edinburgh to face Royal High, kick-off two o'clock.

West of Scotland: Darren Allan; Fraser Brand, Nicky Sutcliffe, Rory Cuthbertson, Rowland Osii; Cammy Finlayson, Jamie Carruth; Pete Rhodes, Connor Moran-Smith, Andrew Love; Scott Cochrane (C); Gareth Craig; Fraser Smeaton, Donald Morrison, John Vasconcelos.

Replacements: Stuart Murray, Jordan Mitchell, Conor Fleming, Callum Rutherford.