

## They Deserved More

West of Scotland Ladies suffered another disappointing defeat, losing 17-34 to Howe Harlequins at Duffus Park. The scoreline doesn't tell the full story of what was a battling performance by the Burnbrae side. Trailing 0-24 after only half an hour, three tries, one of which was converted, brought them to within a score of their hosts. It was Howe, though, who would extend their margin of victory with two tries in the closing minutes.

With joint captain Amanda Paterson joining the long injury list and COVID still impacting on team selection, coach Lindsey Smith was again forced into rejigging her line-up. Rosie Broadhurst took Paterson's number 6 shirt. The blindside flanker would have an excellent debut.

Howe's full back Kelle Nicoll dominated the first half with a hat-trick of tries. She opened the scoring after nine minutes, taking possession on the West 22 to go left of the defence and finding the space to go behind the posts. Stand-off Phoebe Saunders had a simple conversion chance. West replied with no 8 Alex Love making a superb break from her own 22 before being brought down twenty metres from the Howe line. It was as close as West got in the first half. Just short of the midpoint of the half, Howe moved further ahead with a fine score. Saunders flip pass to loose head Lisa Croniken, outstanding in support and with ball in hand throughout, saw the prop make ground before inside centre Rachael Croniken came up on her shoulder to take the ball, throw a huge sidestep to beat the covering defender and score. Saunders converted. The centre was denied a second try thanks to a tremendous effort by West's openside Hannah Foster-Rain who made great ground to haul down Croniken on the West 22. It was Nicoll who would get the next try, a near carbon copy of her first. This time, though, she was forced into the corner and the conversion was missed. Her hat-trick try was similar to her first two but on this occasion, she went right to beat the defence before touching down near the flag.

0-24 behind after half an hour but from then until near the close, West dominated. Five minutes from the interval, Broadhurst broke, Foster-Rain supported before feeding full back Eilidh Power to register West's first points of the game. Rowan Todd slotted the conversion. It had been a tough opening half for the visitors but that score sent them into the interval in good spirits.

West continued to dominate in the second half but it took them until the sixty-fifth minute before they further reduced the gap. Howe had been penalised a number of times by the referee but somewhat surprisingly, her cards remained in her pocket. It was from another penalty West would set up the drive that would see Power get her second try of the game, finishing off in the corner. With eight minutes to go, it was very much game on when lock Louise Wilson got the touchdown as phase after phase of driving play sent the hosts back over their own line. It was now Howe 24 West 17. Could the Burnbrae side get a draw or even a remarkable victory? As the hour rolled in over a heavy pitch on a dreich October afternoon, the home side sealed victory. A score in the corner from a penalty on the West 22 was followed by left wing Clare Buist finishing off good work by the backs. Saunders conversion rounded off the scoring.

Another defeat for the West Ladies but another battling performance. As ever, physio Bex Francis worked overtime, on this occasion for both sides as Howe did not have anyone to fill the role. Thanks, too, to touch judge Amber Johnston. Who knew that one person could provide so much entertainment with a little flag attached to a stick? It is a week off next Sunday for West before they face Stewartry at Burnbrae on 6 November at two o'clock.

West of Scotland Ladies: Eilidh Power; Ailsa Neilson, Jade Scott, Emily Irving, Rowan Todd; Mhairi Mack, Katie Wilson; Amy McHenry, Rachel Morrison, Ashley Blair; Vaness Reid-Phelps, Louise Wilson; Rosie Broadhurst, Hannah Foster-Rain, Alex Love.

Replacements: Alice Masson, Shona Garry, Caitlin Reilly, Kim Toland.