

Thanks to The Youngsters

West of Scotland 31 Whitecraigs 10.

It was NOT one for the purists at Burnbrae on Saturday as West of Scotland made hard work of garnering the five points from a try bonus victory over a Whitecraigs side that must have headed for home wondering how they failed to take even a losing bonus point from a match in which they enjoyed such a share of possession. The answer lay in West having superior backs and the ability to take the chances that presented themselves.

The Burnbrae injury hoodoo was in a mischievous mood this week, leaving it until the pre-game warm-up before an injury to Donald Morrison forced him to withdraw from the starting fifteen and be limited to a seat on the replacements bench. It meant a first start for another of West's promising youngsters, Yousuf Shaheen, at openside flanker. Four of the pack had an average age of eighteen and a half. The backs included two eighteen year-olds and a nineteen year-old. They all would play their part in West's victory.



It was a cold, early spring afternoon but with little wind to affect the play. After last week's disappointing defeat to Allan Glen's, it was imperative West got off to a good start to restore confidence. They did just that. With five minutes on the clock, inside centre Rory Cuthbertson broke and Lewis Howick timed his intrusion perfectly from full back to score in the corner. As has been often the case recently, what West has taken with one hand is quickly returned by the other. It took the visitors only three minutes to draw level. Good work by the pack saw them held up just short of the West line. From the ensuing ruck, scrum half Chris Gordon had a simple task to pick up and score. A not too difficult conversion attempt was missed.

West dominated the opening quarter, plenty of possession but the Whitecraigs defence was secure. It was the visitors who would turn down the opportunity to go ahead after West No 8 John Vasconcelos received a yellow card for a no arms tackle. He could have little complaint. It is possible he was hoping for an early return to the bar to enjoy an England victory over France at Twickenham. Whitecraigs decision to take the scrum and not the relatively easy kick at goal confirmed earlier suspicions they did not have a goal kicker in their ranks. They did come close to a try, though. They moved the ball right before an excellent turnover more or less on his own line by outside centre Nicky Sutcliffe kept the scores level. That was the last highlight of what had become a disappointing first half. Whitecraigs were very much in the game with the score at five points all at the interval.

There was a positive feeling in the home crowd, though, that the young and pacy West backs were more likely to win the game for their side.

No matter what the home crowd may have thought, it was Whitecraigs who would take the lead for the first time three minutes after the restart. Centre Liam Barbour, the most impressive visitor afield, crashed over after what appeared to be clear blocking by a teammate. The referee can only give what he can see so the try stood. It took West only five minutes to draw level and, indeed, regain the lead. It was made by and scored by West's two very promising young locks. Adam Dunford broke with Tino Mudoti in support. The latter powered over for his fourth try of the season.



Cuthbertson's successful conversion gave West a lead they would not relinquish. Just before the hour mark, Vasconcelos increased that lead, beginning and finishing off a fine piece of rugby. He made good ground before finding Morrison, who had just joined the action, in support. Stand-off Jamie Carruth continued the move before Vasconcelos was on hand to score. It was a try of a quality the game so far had not deserved.

Whitecraigs came close after more good work by the forwards, the West defence doing just enough to hold them up in the corner. Mudoti was forced to retire, being replaced by the veteran Gareth Craig. West were most fortunate to have such a quality substitute on the bench. West's narrow seven points lead was doubled after another fine score. Sutcliffe broke from deep, the pace of wing Jack McCallum was with him before the centre took the return pass to score the try that secured the try bonus point and took Sutcliffe to the top of the try-scoring chart for the season. The pain in Scott Cochrane's ankle probably increased at this point. It was Sutcliffe's twelfth of the campaign, putting him one ahead of his injured captain. Cuthbertson was again successful from the tee.

The visitors dominated the final quarter of an hour as they fought to take at least a losing bonus point from the afternoon. They would face only fourteen men for the last ten minutes of the game. West blindside Dylan Matthews received a yellow card for what the referee adjudged to be a tip tackle. The general consensus, at least amongst the home support, was Matthews was probably unfortunate. Whitecraigs have only themselves to blame for leaving Burnbrae empty-handed. With five minutes left they did cross the West line before contriving to drop the ball. The match finished with what should have been a try for Whitecraigs but ended in them conceding another. They again lost possession, on this occasion almost on the home line. The West backs could see the open field on their left and decided to go from their in-goal area. The pass went to ground before the ball was scooped

up by Sutcliffe who headed for the undefended space. Into the Whitecraigs' half he went before drawing the defender and passing to McCallum. The remaining visitor had no chance of halting the pacy youngster. McCallum went round to score under the posts, leaving a simple conversion for Cuthbertson to finish off the afternoon.

It had not been a great game, in fact it had been a poor one. West certainly deserved to win and in doing so, they scored some very good tries. The scoreline did flatter them. With so many inexperienced youngsters in the side, it was an excellent victory. Every one of them contributed their part in the win. With next Saturday the last day of the Six Nations, West do not have a game. West Ladies are at home to Broughton Ladies on Sunday, kick-off two o'clock, in a vital National Shield group game. Your support will be welcomed. In two weeks time, West travel to Aberdeen to face table-toppers Gordonians.