

## A Quiet End to a Fine Season for West

### Strathmore 20 West of Scotland 19

With one of the youngest starting XV's in the recent history of West of Scotland, the Burnbrae side came within a matter of minutes of finishing the season with a win over Strathmore at Inchmacoble Park on Saturday. It was a match the hosts needed to take a try bonus win from to secure their place and join West in next season's reconstructed National Division 3.

West had a solid opening ten minutes on a warm afternoon in Forfar but it was Strathmore who would take the lead after thirteen minutes. Lee Alexander had a simple job to convert from twenty metres after West were penalised for the tackler not releasing. Three minutes later, that home lead was extended as Strathmore got the first of the minimum four tries they required. After the pack drove from a line-out, inside centre James Kiely took possession to crash over. Alexander's conversion was successful.



It took West until just past the mid-point of the half before they reduced the arrears. It was a try that was not dissimilar to their opponents'. From the ruck after a forward drive close to the home line, the ball was moved along the backs for right wing Jack McCallum to score in the corner. Rory Cuthbertson's superb touchline conversion reduced the gap to three points. At this point, West hooker Connor Moran-Smith had to leave the field having aggravated a strain he had picked up in the warm-up. Andrew Love came on in his accustomed tight-head role with Hamish Clark moving to hooker.

West dominated the rest of the half but it took them until the fortieth minute to score again. It was a fine score. After numerous phases, the ball was moved right and found the unlikely figure of lock Tino Mudoti on the touchline. He finished superbly in the corner. It was an effort any wing would have been happy with. Cuthbertson slotted another excellent kick. At the interval, West deservedly led by fourteen points to ten.

It was clear from the restart that the home side realised they had to step up their game to give themselves any chance of being in National Division 3 next season. Within five minutes, stand-off Alexander was held-up over the West line. The resulting goal-line drop out went straight into touch. From the five metres scrum, replacement Darrel Lindsay drove over but he, too, was held-up. West managed to clear their lines on this occasion.

Alexander reduced West's lead to a single point with a second successful penalty goal. With another three tries required, it was somewhat surprising Strathmore elected for the kick at

goal. They were very much on top now but good West defence saw the line rarely threatened. Indeed, it was West who would get the next try with their opponents down to fourteen men after No 8 Glenn Feighan infringed at a ruck close to his own line. It was another fine try, McCallum getting his second score of the game from a long miss pass after the backline had moved the ball at pace. Cuthbertson's third attempt of the game from the right touchline faded just outside the post. West led by six points with ten minutes left.

The Burnbrae men looked good for the win but with just seven minutes left, a missed tackle allowed scrum-half Hamish McWilliam-Gubbins to skip through and go under the posts. Alexander's simple conversion gave his side the win their second half performance probably just deserved. West could have won it when, with three minutes to go, Strathmore left wing Roger Webster received a yellow card for a deliberate knock-on. It looked a fairly simple kick for Cuthbertson but his dreadful sclaff saw the ball roll gently into the Strathmore 22 before being collected and cleared. It was a hugely



disappointing end to the game and, indeed, the season. If the kick had gone over, the players would have left the field with another away win under their belts and headed into their much-deserved break with heads held high. Their summers have now been ruined and the coaching staff will have a battle on their hands to have the squad motivated for next season. Dearie me.

There are a number of games in the division outstanding. Strathmore have to travel to champions-elect Gordonians and then Allan Glen's. They need six points from these two games to be in National League 3 next season. It is a tall task. West have completed their fixtures and will probably finish fourth in the table. They would have settled for that at the start of the season. But for their horrendous injury problems, they could have taken second place. On the plus side, a number of youngsters have been blooded in senior rugby. That can only be of benefit for next season.

Although the men can now enjoy their summer, West of Scotland Ladies have the National Shield to play for. They face Dundee Valkyries in the semi-final at Burnbrae next Sunday, 23 April at two o'clock. Your support would be greatly appreciated.