

Last Gasp Despair for West Youngsters

West of Scotland U18 33 Stirling County U18 34.

Two seasons ago, West of Scotland U18 side lost the final of the National Youth Cup to Boroughmuir, the Edinburgh breaking the tie with the last play of the match. On Saturday, it looked for much of the game that the Burnbrae side would have their chance of revenge as they led Stirling County by seven points with three minutes left on the clock. It had been an enthralling contest played at the Hive Stadium at Murrayfield. West had a line-out on their own 22. County stole possession and West were penalised at the breakdown. A kick to the corner, a catch and drive and Daniel Casserley drew his side to within two points of West with the conversion attempt to come. It was missed. West still led. They had played the better rugby throughout the game but repeatedly conceded ground to their opponents through a succession of penalties. With the seconds ticking down, West turned over County ball twenty metres from the West line then allowed County to do likewise. There was an inevitability about what happened next. West again fell foul of the referee. It could only be a kick at goal. County scrum half Thomas Nodes made no mistake from the tee. The whistle blew and West, having led by sixteen points just before the interval, were left to reflect on what could and should have been

The opening minute was a portent of things to come. West were penalised from the kick-off. A kick to the corner, a catch and drive and openside Casserley went over. It took just five minutes for West to draw level. After good work by the West forwards, County were penalised just short of their own line. The alert Cameron Loudon took the quick tap before the scrum half sent loose-head Callum Cairns in. Ben Taylor put his side ahead with the conversion. It was Taylor's excellent miss pass that would allow Andrew Williamson to extend the West lead, Taylor again kicking the goal. The gap was extended further after twenty-five minutes through Rory Caldwell's opportunist score. The full back took a clearance kick on the County ten metres line before skipping down the touchline, evading three tacklers to score. Taylor again added the extras.

Despite the West lead, County were always in the game as West conceded a succession of penalties. After five penalties in quick succession in the West 22, it was no surprise when Taylor was the recipient of a "team yellow" when ruled offside close to his try-line. What was surprising was the referee's decision to award a penalty try. At half-time, West led by 21-12.

On the resumption, with West still a player short, County narrowed the gap to two points. After West knocked on thirty-five metres out, the powerful blindside Kieran Mooney picked up and carried from the scrum. He found Alasdair Banks on his shoulder, releasing the winger to score. Nodes converted. West would score the try of the afternoon as Taylor returned. Loudon broke, Christian Ward supported and Ethan Reilly finished off an excellent piece of rugby. With just ten minutes left, a move from the training ground saw West fourteen points clear. Again Nodes was involved, a tap penalty on the County five metres line with Jack Thomson on the crash ball to power over. Taylor converted. County needed a quick response and they got it through a near identical score. Nodes tapped and loose-head

Mickey Kesson touched down. It looked, though, as if West would do enough to reach another final. But then came the last three minutes when it was all taken away from them.