

## Vital Win For West

### Hamilton Bulls 24 West of Scotland 36.

West of Scotland won the tactical battle and the league points, with a try bonus, at Laigh Bent on Saturday. It moved them ten points clear of their opponents who remain in bottom spot in National League Division 3.

On a cold, wet, miserable afternoon, Hamilton won the toss but elected to face the strong wind in the first half. A succession of early penalties in the home 22 saw West go into the lead after eight minutes, immediately after home openside Ross Campbell had been the recipient of a “team yellow”. After the visitors again opted to take the scrum, the forwards drove in phases to create the overlap for left wing Callum McCormack to score. Lewis Howick converted.



Despite having the advantage of the elements, West found it difficult to break down a strong Hamilton defence. Indeed, it was the hosts who would score next, at the mid-point of the half. In a rare foray into the West 22, Andrew Crawford went through a wide gap in the visitors' defence. Before the game could be restarted, lock Connor Fleming was stretched off, the West youngster being replaced by Adam Dunford.

Although West had failed to add to their early lead, they clearly had the correct game plan. They were playing a kicking game to take advantage of the wind at the backs. Hamilton, though,

were trying to play their usual expansive rugby, no matter where on the field they were. It was not a day for that. Trying to run from inside their own 22, a pass went to ground. Darren Allan hacked ahead and easily won the race to touch down. Howick slotted another fine conversion attempt. It was another Hamilton error that allowed their opponents to extend their lead five minutes before the interval. After Dunford had been held up over the home line, the drop-out from under the posts went straight to the hands of centre Gareth Hopkins who scored with ease. Howick had his third successful attempt from the tee and West led by 21-5.

Sixteen points was by no means a decisive lead with Hamilton having the advantage of the wind in the second half. Within two minutes, they had narrowed the gap. It was another poor try. A wild clearance kick from close to the West line was collected fifteen metres out by Gary Adams. The number 8 broke a couple of weak tackles to power over. Mark Boyle converted. It was clear Hamilton were to continue trying to run the ball. On an afternoon made for the boot, it is difficult to recall even one instance when the home side did try to

take advantage of the wind. West, though, played the ideal game. The ball carriers, led by skipper Scott Cochrane, made ground every time, always with support to hand. Two tries in the space of two minutes before the end of the third quarter gave the Burnbrae men the winning advantage. A tap penalty saw the forwards drive to the home line before Cochrane picked up at the back of the ruck to go over. That was the try bonus score. It was followed almost immediately by another try that owed much to a Hamilton error. Loose ball thirty metres out was not secured. Howick hacked ahead and used the wet turf to slide over and score. Any hopes Hamilton had of getting back into the game were probably over when hooker Billy Simpson became the second home player to receive a yellow card.

Hamilton reduced the deficit through Jamie Gemmell's try, the wing being on the end of a long miss pass after a tap penalty and a forward drive. That score brought Hamilton to within a converted try of a losing bonus point and a try bonus point. Their poor discipline would again prove to be their undoing with lock Jordan McLean receiving what seemed for him an inevitable yellow card after a slight disagreement amongst the forwards. It was not the first time McLean had got involved and on this occasion, he may have been fortunate not to have suffered the ultimate sanction.



With seven minutes left, Allan's second try of the afternoon extended West's lead to three scores. Not really in keeping with the rest of the match, this was a fine try. From a scrum, outside centre Nicky Sutcliffe made ground before drawing his man and throwing a perfectly timed long pass to allow his winger to sprint in from twenty metres. Crawford's try with the last move of the game did give Hamilton the consolation of a try bonus point. Boyle converted from in front of the posts.

West left with what they came for, five league points. It was never going to be a great game of rugby in strong wind and driving rain. West, though, played the conditions perfectly and got their reward. We now enter the festive break with West at home to Allan Glen's when the league programme resumes on 13 January. Kick-off will be two o'clock.

West of Scotland Ladies were awarded a 28-0 victory when Greenock Wanderers Ladies were unable to fulfil the fixture. It secured West third place in West Division 1. An excellent effort in an injury-ravaged season. They now move into the cup competitions in the New Year, the draws for which have still to be made.