

West Ladies One Step From Murrayfield Return Strathmore Ladies 14 West of Scotland Ladies 42

West of Scotland Ladies continued their defence of the National Shield, reaching the semi-final stage after completing the group stage with maximum points. A single bonus point was all that was required at Inchmacoble Park on Sunday but they scored eight tries in a dominant display.

It is seven weeks since West last took to the field and changes were required. Ashley Blair, normally used as an impact player from the bench, started at tight-head prop. Ellie Williamson returned to the side in an unaccustomed No 8 role with Louise Wilson and Megan Scullion forming the second row partnership.

Although soft underfoot, conditions were otherwise fine. Strathmore were very much an unknown quantity but it was clear the home side would have a considerable physical advantage. That advantage was reduced, numerically at least, after only two minutes when openside Georgia Lysaght seemed fortunate to escape with a yellow card after a high tackle. West were quickly into their stride with Tash Burge's long miss-pass leaving Jade Scott an easy run-in. Rachel Morrison has been in excellent form since taking over the scrum-half role from the departed Katie Wilson. Morrison extended her side's lead, picking up and going over from five metres after Scullion's powerful drive was halted just short of the line. A typical no 9's try.

Before the mid-point of the half, Scott took the gap to fifteen points, the centre sprinting clear after Blair's clever chip over the rush defence. There would be some disappointment with the ease with which Lysaght got her side on the scoreboard on the half hour, the successful conversion reducing the visitor's lead to single figures. Any concerns were removed only two minutes later when Amber Johnston finished off some excellent play by the backs. It was the try that secured the bonus point required to take West into the semi-final. It also gave them a half-time lead of twenty points to seven.

Strathmore had defended well in the first half and were forced into more of the same in the second period. The pattern of the match did not change. The West forwards always gained ground, providing good possession for their backs with wings Ellen Forsyth and Ailsa Neilson looking dangerous with ball in hand. Johnston's second try of the afternoon after fine handling along the backline more or less secured victory for Burnbrae side. Scott recorded her hat-trick after Holly MacDonald and Rosie Broadhurst combined with Williamson to clear the home defence and leave the centre with the simplest of finishes. After another high tackle saw Strathmore again reduced in the ranks for ten minutes, Pamela Duffy's outrageous dummy brought a smile to her face and a hat-trick for Johnston, the full-back finishing with ease. West's final try came after Wilson broke into the home 22. Alexa Smith was in support to take the lock's pass and touch down. Rowan Todd converted. On time, Strathmore centre Mia White, who impressed throughout, forced her way through a couple of weak tackles to go under the posts. The whistle for no side blew after the simple conversion.

This was West's first game in seven weeks and there were a lot of cobwebs to blow away. A number of injuries were also suffered leading to a number of personnel moves. In the circumstances, it was an impressive victory. A huge thanks to physio Bex Francis and a number of others in the squad for their professional expertise in dealing with the injured parties.

West of Scotland Ladies will travel to face Grangemouth in the National Shield semi-final on 7 April. Kick-off will be at two o'clock.