

Ayr Ladies 36 West of Scotland Ladies 20.

This was a scoreline that did not do justice to the West Ladies' performance. It was a match they could have won until their hosts recorded two tries without reply in the closing stages.

With Millbrae unplayable, the match was switched to the artificial surface at the excellent Riverside Sports Arena. West welcomed back Ellie Williamson after over a year out through injury. Scottish Rugby had managed the forward's return to fitness, stipulating that this first appearance should be limited to twenty minutes.

West took an early lead with an excellent try. Alex Love carried into the Ayr 22 and set up the ruck. From there, the ball went through the hands of the backs to allow Laura Martin to make full use of the overlap and score in the corner. That area of the pitch must have given the referee his greatest concern when he carried out his pitch inspection before the game with the surface white.

Lauren Finnie has always been a dangerous runner when West have faced Ayr, whether at full back or on the wing. It was from 15 she came into the line to use her pace to take her clear of the West defence and draw the sides level. Equally, no 8 Joanne Jones makes full use of her power and strong running ability. She did so to move the home side ahead just past the midpoint of the half, driving off the maul to score. Love would draw West level, breaking tackles as she ran in from twenty-five metres. Almost immediately, Jones found a gap in the West defence to secure her second try of the afternoon. Catherine Shennan, Ayr's outstanding player throughout, secured the conversion. It was the last action of the half with Ayr possibly just deserving that seven points lead. For West, Williamson had had a very positive return, strong in the tackle and support running and always gaining ground when she carried.

Vanessa Reid-Phelps pulled West within two points five minutes into the second half. The tight-head finished off a powerful forward drive, going in from ten metres. West were playing the better rugby but were unable to break down the home defence. They fell further behind as they were again unable to halt the strong running Jones, the no 8 completing her hat-trick and securing Ayr's try bonus point. Shennan added the extras.

West did not give up. Jade Scott reduced the gap to four points, the centre side-stepping opponents as she broke from thirty metres. In doing so, she made sure of her side's try bonus. That, though, was as good as it got for the visitors. In the last ten minutes, Gemma McIvor and Toni Craig added to Ayr's try tally with Craig's effort converted by Shennan.

A disappointing defeat for West but they were a match for the league leaders until that last period. Williamson's return was a huge boost for both player and the side. It was, though, the long-serving Anna Campbell's last appearance, for the time being, in the West colours. She left in fine style, deservedly being named West's "Player of the Match". We wish Anna well as she continues her professional career and, no doubt, her rugby one, too, in New Zealand.

