

Bonus Point Start For West Ladies

West of Scotland Ladies 56 Oban Lorne Ladies 36.

A new look West of Scotland Ladies got their league campaign off to the best possible start in a highly entertaining victory over Oban Lorne Ladies at Burnbrae on Sunday. No fewer than sixteen tries were scored, ten of them to the home side.

When the game kicked-off, West's starting XV included only eight of the side that won the National Shield at Murrayfield in May. A number of players are no longer available for a variety of reasons, from emigration to old age. It was good to see some from the latter category on the touchline to lend their support. It was, though, an experienced side and within nine minutes they had crossed their opponents' line on two occasions and led by twelve points. Both scores were down to good support play by both backs and forwards. No 8 Louise Wilson drove over after West retained possession through a number of phases. New skipper Alexa Smith converted that try before centre Jade Scott repeated Wilson's effort.

Any thoughts West were in for an easy afternoon were quickly forgotten as Oban loose-head Julie Campbell powered in from fifteen yards with stand-off Ellie Macinnes narrowing the gap between the sides to five points. Scott's second try of the afternoon extended West's lead before two tries from the visitors turned the match on its head. Macinnes, who looked sharp all afternoon with ball in hand, showed exceptional pace to go wide of the West defence before cutting back in to leave herself with a simple conversion. It was Campbell who would put Oban ahead just past the half-hour mark, being on hand to finish off a forward drive. Macinnes, clearly an excellent footballer, made it three out of three from the tee.

West's deficit of four points lasted but one minute before Kim Toland finished off a fine move by the backs to score in the corner. That secured the try bonus point. Wilson's second try and Smith's conversion on the half-time whistle saw the hosts lead by 29-21 at the interval. It had been a hugely enjoyable first forty minutes with both sides clearly deciding not to risk infringing the new tackle law by not making any tackles at all.

Two early second half tries through Smith and Amber Johnston extended the West lead to eighteen points. Between these scores, two players were forced to retire. Left wing Toland with what looked like a shoulder injury and scrum half Katie Wilson with ginger hair. An Oban try brought them back to within two scores before the sides shared four scores in a seven minutes spell. A fine individual effort by Scott saw her record her hat-trick before Oban scrum-half Rachel Macdonald scored a typical scrum-half try, darting over from close range after the pack had driven to the West line. Scott's fourth try of the match increased her side's lead to eighteen points before centre Poppy McKillop's burst took her through the home defence. The scoring was finished off by the try that drew the biggest cheer of the afternoon. Bex Francis-Silverton, on her return from motherhood to combined player/physio duties, celebrated by running in from thirty metres. A proud Emlyn Ellis

Francis-Silverton watched on from father Rob's arms on the touchline. Smith's conversion rounded off matters at West of Scotland 56 Oban Lorne 36.

A thoroughly enjoyable afternoon for all present with the probable exception of the coaching staff on both sides. It is safe to say a lot of work will be done on the defensive side of the game at this week's training sessions. Next Sunday, West are at home again with Wigtownshire the visitors. Kick-off at Burnbrae will be two o'clock.

West of Scotland Ladies: Amber Johnston; Rachael Millar, Jade Scott, Laura Martin; Alexa Smith, Katharine Wilson; Natasha Burge, Alice Masson, Vanessa Reid-Phelps; Anna Campbell, Ciera Campbell; Rachel Morrison, Millie Jackson, Louise Wilson.

Replacements: Ashley Blair, Louise Skilling, Caitlin Reilly, Bex Francis-Silverton, Ellen Forsyth.