

West Leave it Late

Whitecraigs 17 West of Scotland 22

A strong wind and sporadic, heavy showers of rain suggested those who braved the elements at West Lodge on Saturday could expect rugby that would be more Pomagne than Champagne. They got much more than they could have hoped for, a game for the purists with the result in doubt right up until the last whistle was blown.

West kicked off, their hosts having elected to take advantage in the first half of the wind that was blowing diagonally from corner flag to corner flag. It was the men from Burnbrae who got off to the best possible start with a try after only four minutes. Left wing Callum McCormack supported Nicky Sutcliffe's break and when the centre was held up just short of the line, McCormack took possession to score in the corner.



The home side was soon level. After a 50/22, they moved left from the line-out. The ball went quickly along the line with full back Liam Barbour finishing off textbook back play.

Play settled down into a strong forward battle but with both sets of backs looking capable of breaking their opponents' defensive line.

On the mid-point of the half, West moved back into the lead through a Grady Slater try, the centre taking stand-off Jamie Carruth's perfectly timed pass to score. Not for the first time this season, a West score was soon followed by them gifting points to their opponents. They knocked-on from the restart kick and when stand-off Grant Berry kicked into the in-goal area from the resulting scrum, Barbour was first to the ball to touch down. On what was a very difficult day for goalkickers, Graham Murchie came closest so far, his effort striking a post.

There was no further scoring in the first period but that was down to good defence by both sides. It was a very competitive match with West probably happier with the half-time score of ten points all. They would have the advantage of the diagonal wind in the second period.

The wind had actually died down when Whitecraigs restarted the game. The visitors again started the half strongly. After McCormack had knocked-on with the line open in the first

minute, the winger quickly atoned for his error with a superb break. After he was halted just short of the Whitecraigs line, the ball was recycled for No 8 Jon Vasconcelos to crash over. Rory Cuthbertson had his first success of the day from the kicking tee. Again, though, West allowed their opponents to draw level almost immediately. Poor defence allowed the home forwards to drive into the 22 with veteran No 8 Craig Percival showing a surprising turn of pace to go under the posts. Murchie was successful with the kick.



A few niggly incidents between the forwards had been testing the referee's patience and with fifteen minutes left, a player from either side received a yellow card. It was not even handbags between West's Fraser Smeaton and home right wing James Baxendale, more clutch purse, but the official decided they should go.



The extra space afforded the backs should have meant a winning try for someone and it was West who got it – through a forward. Not for the first time this season, skipper Scott Cochrane was the man who clinched the victory and the try bonus point for his side. Whitecraigs saw some good possession in the closing five minutes but never really threatened to draw level.

For the sixth successive match, the final winning margin has been a score. Great entertainment for the spectators, not great for the coaching team.

Everyone has a week off next Saturday with Scotland facing Wales at Murrayfield. On 18 February, West travel to Cupar to face Howe of Fife. On Sunday, 19 February, West of Scotland Ladies begin their National Shield campaign with Cartha Queen's Park the visitors to Burnbrae. Kick-off in both matches is two o'clock.

West of Scotland: Rory Cuthbertson; Fraser Brand, Nicky Sutcliffe, Grady Slater; Callum McCormack; Jamie Carruth, Callum Rutherford; Hamish Clark; Connor Moran-Smith, Andrew Love; Scott Cochrane, Tino Mudoti; Dylan Matthews, Donald Morrison, Jon Vasconcelos.

Replacements: Adam Dunford, Gareth Craig, Fraser Smeaton, Yousuf Shaheen.