

West Just Do Enough – eventually.

West of Scotland 36 Perthshire 24

For the second week in succession, West of Scotland would be slow starters, falling seventeen points down to Perthshire just after the mid-point of the first half. They did just enough to come back to win a game the result of which was in doubt until the closing minutes. It was a match that would have had the respective coaches sharing a beer and a wee greet after the game. An error-strewn eighty minutes that, nevertheless, provided good entertainment for the spectators who braved the chill on an afternoon. Mother Nature retained her winter garb.

Such is the club's injury toll, second XV coach Allan Sneddon was forced to play a full eighty minutes at flanker in his side's match with Whitecraigs. A remarkable effort for one who can



remember Elsie Tanner's first husband. Connor Moran-Smith returned to hooker, Hamish Clark moving back to his more-accustomed role of loose head prop. The second row partnership of Gareth Craig and Adam Dunford had an average age of twenty-seven with neither player being within nine years of that number. The ubiquitous Dylan Matthews was at openside flanker this week. Stand-off Jamie Carruth was missing after his injury at Gordonians. His replacement that afternoon, Cammy Finlayson, took the No 10 shirt in an otherwise unchanged back division. There was a welcome return to the squad for winger Callum

McCormack, so impressive this season until injury struck. He would get a much-needed forty minutes of rugby.

Perthshire have had a disappointing season, lying third bottom of National League, Division 3. They must have been surprised at the strong position they found themselves in in the opening quarter of this match. With only four minutes on the clock, they went ahead after good driving by the pack saw them set up a ruck on the West line. Scrum half Andrew Sanderson had the simple task to pick up and go over. His half-back partner Mat Rae converted. It was Rae who would get the visitors' second try after quarter of an hour, forcing his way over after more good work by the forwards. At this time, Perthshire were forced into a change with inside centre Tom Bartlett replaced by Jack McIntosh. The replacement took just eight minutes to get his name on the scoresheet, taking Rae's cross-kick to score easily in the corner.

Seventeen points down, seventeen minutes left in the half. It was imperative West got the next score. They did so with a simple try. Quick ruck ball was moved along the back line, the overlap created for Rowland Osii to score in the corner. The gap was reduced further with another example of the rugby brain of teenage full back Lewis Howick. Not for the first time, he demonstrated his ability to time perfectly his intrusion into the line. From a scrum thirty metres out, Howick appeared between his centres to take possession and use his pace

to go under the posts. Finlayson's successful conversion was the last score of the half. Perthshire led by seventeen points to twelve at the interval after the definitive half of two halves.

It was Howick who would draw West level within thirty seconds of the restart. Perthshire knocked-on on their 10 metres line, Osii gathered the loose ball and found Howick in support. The full back skipped round the covering defender to score in the corner. Remarkably, West were ahead a matter of minutes later. The pack drove, Finlayson broke, Sutcliffe supported and recorded his thirteenth try of the season. Finlayson's accurate boot made West's lead seven points.

All the signs suggested West would go on to record a comfortable victory. They were dominating possession, the backs, with McCormack having replaced Jack McCallum at half-time, were looking sharp. Then they fell asleep again. They dropped the ball just inside their own half. Any one of four West men could have got to the ball first but it was Perthshire's left wing John Kelly who kicked ahead. Osii did well to prevent a try, bringing Kelly down just short of the line. The referee awarded the scrum to the visitors. From it, openside Calum Chalmers picked up and scored with ease. Rae's conversion drew the sides level.

West moved back into the lead when Dunford scored from a ruck on the Perthshire line. The lead, though, was only five points with almost half an hour left for play. That half hour was not the most technically competent thirty minutes of the season with both sides failing to retain possession for any length of time. Indeed, there was only one more score. With West watches being looked at nervously every thirty seconds, the win was finally secured with five minutes left. It was again the Finlayson to Sutcliffe combination that would see the centre take the pop-up pass to get his second try of the afternoon. Finlayson's conversion rounded off the scoring.



Ten tries in the match, a try bonus to both sides. West's win ensured their place in National League, Division 3 next season, with Perthshire in the new Division 4. It was very much an end of season game but West deserve credit for another win with a heavily-depleted squad. One person who was praised by all concerned was referee Amber Stamp-Dunstan, the Welsh official in Scotland through Scottish Rugby's exchange programme with the Welsh Rugby Union. We wish Amber well in her refereeing career.

Next Saturday, 8 April, West will play Royal High at Burnbrae in their final home game of the season. Kick-off is three o'clock.