The Austin Blacks stayed undefeated and atop the league table in Texas with a 31-25 defeat the Dallas Reds Saturday at Burr Field in Austin, Texas.

The Blacks ran in five tries to the Reds' one, but Dallas flyhalf Peter Clifford slotted six conversions to keep the game within reach. In the final minutes, Dallas made a threatening move that nearly resulted in an upset win.

The Reds threw the ball wide off a lineout and made a break wide of Austin's outside center. The ball carrier got to within a couple of meters of pay dirt before being dragged down by reserve Blacks fullback James Watson. Austin scrambled back in defense and stymied Dallas' late comeback attempt.

The Blacks led 19-9 at intermission but left some tries on the board in the first half by dropping some passes that could have put them in for scores.

Outside center Curtis Chaffin scored two tries in the opening 30 minutes before suffering a head injury and being subbed out. His replacement, Levi Kereti, spelled well with two tries of his own.

Austin is still without the services of starting scrumhalf Zack Triplett, who is resting a strained hamstring. But one of Austin's most recent additions – former Kiwi age-grader Callum Cook – served well at No. 9 in his absence.

"He's been excellent for us," said Austin coach Lachlan Ferguson of Cook. "When Zack gets back fit, there's going to b e a lot of competition for that starting spot."

Austin is deep at a lot of positions, so even though the Blacks are well into their season, the competition for starting jobs is ongoing. Austin's depth improved even more Saturday with the return of forward Will Martin, a stalwart for Austin at No. 8 the last couple of years who flirted with retirement.

"I feel like we're bubbling and very soon we're going to get it all right, and when it clicks we're going to really put a show on," said Ferguson.

"We have a huge amount of depth this year, so the first four games of the year has really been a case of giving everybody an opportunity, and now we're going into the phase where we're going to try and cement some combinations – where we want to go, where we want to play."

Guys like Chaffin and Triplett will have some time to recover now, as the Blacks don't play another league match until Feb. 16.

Elsewhere in Texas Saturday, last place Fort Worth knocked off the previously unbeaten Austin Huns 7-3. That result drops the Huns to 2-1 and improves Fort Worth's record to 1-3. The Dallas Harlequins improved to 2-1 with a 38-18 defeat of The Woodlands Saturday. The loss drops The Woodlands to 1-3. The Huns beat the 'Quins and The Woodlands beat Fort Worth earlier this season.