

Carloway 1 West Side 3. 20/04/09

Stuart Rankin,

ABC Cup Round 2:

Carloway (1) 1 West Side (0) 3

Seumus Macleod 20

Scott Graham 57, 75, 90+2

An unhappy evening for the Blues, as a tie which they probably feel they should have had sewn up within an hour was allowed to drift away from them, due to bad luck, unfortunate circumstance, and excellent opportunism on the part of West Side' s main striker. In some respects it was a repeat of Friday' s game with Lochs: the crowd was smaller but again, we had a beautiful clear, but cold, spring evening, although the wind was thankfully absent. For Carloway, the back four that finished that game started and, again, performed competently, despite the eventual score-sheet; Calum Moody, Kenny Beag and Chris Macleod were out, while Kenny Dokus passed himself, unwisely as it turned out, fit to play and tired early; Billy Anderson joined him centrally in midfield, with Kevin Savo up front partnering Seamus Macleod, and Kevin Gochan dropping to the bench.

For a change in these derbies, both sides decided to play football rather than indulge in unarmed conflict. In fact, the first half was so low-key, it was hard to believe it was Carloway v. West Side; indeed, there was only one yellow card, late on for dissent. An early free-kick taken by West' s keeper carried the length of Cnoc a' Choilich into the Blues' penalty area and was fired over. Then Seumus Macleod ghosted in behind West Side' s defence and beat the keeper to the ball but in the subsequent scramble, the ball was booted clear. Initially West Side were having more possession and another dangerous free-kick led to a ping-pong melée on the edge of na Gormaich' s box before Carloway unexpectedly took the lead from a wind-assisted corner which swirled in under West Side's bar, deceiving the keeper, and was nodded in by Seumus Macleod. Two minutes later, Billy Anderson cracked the top of the crossbar from 22 metres as the game began to swing in Carloway's favour, and just before the break Kenny Dokus had his best moment with a neat run through the middle and a low, wide shot.

Carloway should have booked their place in the semis on 56 minutes when following a pinball skirmish in West' s box and scrambled clearance, the ball was punted back in from the halfway line. The keeper came for it and totally misjudged the high bounce which cleared his head and landed at Seumus Macleod's feet, 10 metres out with a solitary defender on the goal-line, but instead of going for a simple tap-in, Seumus sent a spectacular effort straight up like a Saturn rocket. Immediately the Blues were made to pay when the ball broke in their area to Scott Graham running cross-wise to his left and he slipped the ball neatly between the legs of the advancing Craigie.

Another stramash followed in West' s box before na Gormaich had a reasonable penalty claim on 67 minutes when substitute Gochan was bundled off the ball at the goal-line after a penetrating run down the right.

Certainly the equaliser had enlivened proceedings and play raged now from end to end but it was Scott Graham who was to stun Carloway with a cracking conversion from 16 metres after a loose ball was not cleared effectively and broke to him in front of goal. The Blues now threw everything forward but failed to exploit the wings where Kevin Gochan was in the mood and Gordon Tago seemed to have the beating of Donnie Smith for speed. Again they were unlucky when a reasonable penalty claim was denied as Squeg, on for the final few minutes, was brought down in the box from behind as he surged towards goal. Billy Anderson then came close with a header before Graham applied the coup de grâce as he broke free unmarked on Carloway's left and stroked the ball coolly past Craigie.

It wasn't the finest game I've ever seen, with relatively uninspiring performances from both sides, the difference ultimately being an ace predator who didn't fail to take any chance that came before him. Thus, hat-trick hero Scott Graham has to be my Man of the Match. Carloway's problems were, once again, lack of weight and direction in midfield. Kenny Dokus didn't look 100% fit to me and probably should not have played; in the ten minutes or so that Squeg was on, his presence, control, and calm approach on the ball, demonstrated exactly what the Blues are missing, along with the dogged determination and forcefulness of Kenny MacLennan. Hopefully they will all be fit for Harris on the 29th. Unfortunately, Scott Macaulay will be longer in the treatment room. Billy Anderson and Kevin Savo had imposing first halves but, overall, best for Carloway were the goalkeeper and the back four; Andrew Tago was outstanding and is my Carloway Man of the Match, shading it from Domhnall and Craigie, the latter of whom was sound throughout and had a particularly superb punched clearance from a ruck in the first half. After Fabianski's performance on Saturday, I'm sure I saw Arsène Wenger at the side of the shed watching Gordon closely.