

## **Back 4 Carloway 5. 04/05/09**

Stuart Rankin,

L.& H.League:

### **Back (2) 4 Carloway (3) 5**

*Hector Macphee 11      Billy Anderson 25, 40*  
*David Maciver 22      Gordon Tago 42*  
*Chris Adams 55      Kenny Maclennan 84,90+1*  
*Inny Red Campbell 72*

Last night, it was a decade and a day since Carloway had last defeated Back in the League, 3-2 at home, with a side that included John Brooks, na Gormaich' s present treasurer, and Gordon Craigie (as a striker), though they did win 3-0 at Cnoc a' Choilich in the HAC in 2003 (again with Gordon Craigie in the side) after a 0-0 draw at Back, the last time they did not lose in Coll Uarach. Their last victory in the east was around the time of Culloden; check with the National Register Office in Edinburgh.

Injury problems continued to haunt the Blues: Calum Tom Moody, Andrew V.P., and Scott Macaulay were still out, and were now joined by Seumas Macleod (ankle) and Darren Mackinnon (flu); Squeg and Kenny Beag could only be risked as subs. This meant DI Maclennan joined the Mackay brothers and Andrew Tago in the back four at left back for his first full senior start; Kenny Dokus, now fully fit, began in right midfield alongside versatile stalwart Billy Anderson, with Kevin Gochan and Gordon Tago deployed as usual as withdrawn wingmen; Kevin Savo led the line with Alex Smith tucked behind him in a forward central midfield role.

A freezing southerly came whipping down to assist the Blues to start promisingly and on 5 minutes a long, diagonal cross from Dokus deceived the Back defence and Gordon Tago broke clear. One-on-one, Andy Thompson was quick to block to his right. Then, Kenny Dokus went close himself, before a high ball found Hector Macphee running clear on the right and his crashing shot from 20 metres whizzed by Craigie on his left. An exquisite nod-on from Kevin Savo set up Gordon Tago ghosting by his marker but his screaming shot went a couple of metres wide. Then Carloway failed to clear a corner on their right. The ball was returned to their right, the cross headed out again, but this time David Maciver, about 22 metres out, in the inside left position, crashed a beautiful left foot shot high inside Craigie's right hand post.

The Blues were repeatedly being caught square; the back four kept close but low defence splitters kept wrong-footing Calum and DI, and over the top passes involved Pongo and Domhnall in races with Macphee and Inny Red. Thus Gochan and Gordon Tago, who started threateningly, were drawn deeper. However, Carloway didn' t sag: Kenny Dokus (who was everything he wasn' t against West Side) surged forward, and squared to Billy Anderson, about 25 metres out; he beat a couple of men, turned, turned back again, and stroked a low shot just inside the Back left-hand post. Moments later, Murray Macleod could have killed it when an excellent defence-cutter between Pongo

and Calum Mackay released him to run in from the left but he carried too close and Craigie made an excellent block. As the break loomed, the Blues had an astonishing two minutes: first, Andy Thompson failed to hold under his bar, under pressure from wind and bodies; the ball bobbed about like a balloon before Anderson managed to force it home. Then Andrew Tago sent a high ball downfield. Clearly, the Back defence expected it to carry through but Gordon Tago chased it up and won it. He kept his head, let the goalie commit himself, sidestepped him, steadied himself and stroked it past two retreating defenders.

Carlway have been here before, mainly against Lochs, and Back didn't disappoint. Na Gormaich weren't helped by the second-half absence of Domhnall Mackay with a thigh strain. Alex Smith dropped back, and Squeg appeared in midfield, but the defence had lost its shape. Pongo was overworked, minding Alex and DI, and the Bacachs surged. A shot went narrowly over before a high through ball deceived Pongo, then Craigie; Chris Adams won and controlled it, turned inside, and converted from 10 metres. The game was now inexorably drifting Back's way; eventually a through ball was flicked on and Inny Red ran free in the centre to flick past Craigie.

Most people in Coll probably thought that was it - including the Back players, who unconsciously relaxed - and the Blues crept back into the game, assisted by subs Dan Crossley and Kenny Beag, replacing Kevin Savo and Billy Anderson. On 80 minutes, Alex Smith had a good chance, 20 metres out, but shot over, then four minutes later, Kenny Beag was sent racing through the centre; he won the ball, allowed his marker to commit, then stumble, before moving past him to his left, and ramming a low shot through the advancing keeper's legs. It wasn't over yet. Carlway now had the initiative: in injury time Dan Crossley stole the ball on the right from Ross Hall and slipped it back to Gochan whose neat low cross was met on the near corner of the 6 metre box and clipped cleanly into the far corner.

An absolute corker of a game, well handled by Robert Mackay ! Back won it twice; the Blues rose Lazarus-like twice, and took it at the end. I never thought I'd see Back lose five at Coll Uarach. It's hard to figure out how. The back four were good on the ball and distributed it well; those in front of them moved well off the ball to receive their piercing forward balls, and the forwards broke free fast and menacingly. However, at the same time, when Carlway did come forward, they seemed to find plenty of room to manoeuvre, with Billy Anderson outstanding in the first half, and Kenny Dokus - one of the few players who knew how to use the wind well - kept dropping awkward high balls into their box; two intelligently taken goals from Kenny Beag helped too.

Yet I would say that Captain Courageous, Andrew Maciver, has to be my Man of the Match again, solid and unflinching - brutal too when necessary - especially for his Herculean efforts in the second half, when he played like three men.