

Eilean an Fhraoich Cup: R 1 (L 1):

West Side 7 (2) Carloway 1 (0)

? 17

Gordon Tago 88

*Scott Graham 38, 54
76, 80, 81, 86*

At Barvas

17.6.09

Ref.: DJ Maclean

Gordon Craigie

*Di MacIannan Andrew Maciver (capt.) Lewis Uig Andrew VP
Stuart Macdonald Donnie Macphail Domhnall Mackay Gordon Tago
Kenny MacIannan Donald Chisholm*

Subs used: Tom Lawrence (Donald Chisholm) 59; Calum Mackay (Andrew VP) 67; Murdo Sqweg (Stuart Macdonald) 77

With the League race effectively ending at Goathill on Monday night, the other eight island sides knew they now had only two chances left for glory: runners-up in the League or a cup success. West Side are, of course, holders of this Cup and it showed in their approach to this game: a commitment to incisive tackling at the back and in midfield and a relentless desire to get forward, with Aths' Scott Maciver, Carloway' s bête noir from 2008, leading the line. For the Blues, recovery from the mauling at Leurbost was essential: Andrew Tago returned at centre back and was partnered by United' s Lewis Uig for the ineligible Calum Moody, and Domhnall Mackay made a welcome return in central midfield beside Aths' Donnie Macphail. Kenny Beag moved up to lead with Donald Chisholm, while Stuart Macdonald of United made an appearance on the right.

A beautiful summer' s evening saw the home side enjoy a first-half advantage of a strong North-Westerly and evening sun, which helped give them the edge in the opening period: an early corner on the right was only half-cleared and when the loose ball was whipped back in, Murchadh narrowly missed to the left. Then, Scott Maciver eluded Andrew VP on the right, doubled back, and his low cross came off Lewis Uig and just cleared the bar. A Pongo push led to a free-kick about 25 metres out on the left. The right-footer was curled high into the centre of goal and cleared the line-up before dipping under the bar, surprising a sun-dazzled Craigie, desperately flagging at thin air.

Moments later, na Gormaich had their best chance of the half when Gordon Tago broke well on the left and his low cross was met by Kenny Beag about 12 metres out, but his shot spun harmlessly past, despite Chisholm' s attempt to divert it with his knee. A brief flurry of corners followed for Carloway, leading to a scramble in the West Side box, but that was about it for the Blues in terms of chances in the first half. Andrew Tago was fully occupied at the back, attempting to stifle the elusive Maciver, while Domhnall Mackay was having difficulty stemming an aggressive support in midfield and attack, streaming through into the space in the centre, left as Maciver dragged Pongo, and Andrew VP, this way and that in pursuit; Scott Graham was not being picked up. Maciver wriggled free again but screwed his chance wide

before Scott Graham, drifting in from the left, beat a man then cracked a vicious shot low into Craigie' s bottom right-hand corner from 20 metres.

Although West Side had outthought and outgunned Carloway in the first half, the Blues hadn' t been outplayed. The situation was still retrievable, remembering there was a second leg at Cnoc a' Choilich to come. In best Ranieri style, Peter Dokus altered tactics drastically, with Andrew Maciver moving back three years and forward as a striker, to help Tocan make some impression on a solid West back four. Kenny Beag dropped to central midfield, and Domhnall was given the thankless task of trying to mark the best striker on the island out of the game. In the opening twenty minutes, na Gormaich, arguably, had their most effective period, with a short spell of pressure: Gordon Tago set up Chisholm but his shot was deflected past; a Donnie Macphail free-kick from 20 metres went narrowly over. However, West Side were equally close: Craigie managed to clear from a corner, but Scott Maciver once more got loose on the left, dragged Domhnall in best Hidegkuti-style back and forth to the side of the box, as he awaited a racing Graham to meet his carefully-slid pass and stab a screamer from 14 metres high into Craigie' s top-left corner.

Then came Carloway' s best chance: a suspiciously offside-looking Chisholm was allowed to run on centrally on goal, but he carried it too close and the advancing keeper guessed correctly and made a brilliant save low to his right. Carloway redoubled their efforts: Stuart Macdonald had a shot blocked after being presented with a glorious ball from Gordon Tago; the keeper made an excellent save from a Tom Lawrence shot from 20 metres, and Pongo hit the side-net with the rebound. West Side were largely untroubled, and were content to ride the pressure and break free and dangerously. This was reflected in the number of free-kicks the Blues kept giving away in tricky positions around their area. By adding weight to the attack, a gaping hole had been left at the back. Domhnall Mackay tried hard to plug it, but it wasn' t just Maciver that was in razor-sharp form. The rest of the defence were chasing, not tackling, and shape was now totally gone. Predictably Domhnall tired, and in the last quarter of an hour everything went pear-shaped, as Maciver and Graham helped others add to the score. Every time West Side came forward, a goal seemed likely. Right at the end, from a free-kick out on the left, Gordon Tago sent a fierce low shot from 22 metres round the wall into the far corner; it was a beauty but by then the match, and tie, had already been settled. The second leg is a formality.

Which experience was worse? Leurbost or Barvas? Carloway could make little impression: a misfiring forward line and stretched defence found it difficult to compete with a West Side without a weakness, even at the back when Murchadh had to be substituted early. Up front, Maciver and Graham were uncontainable and the former, especially, was in sparkling form, bursting forward, wanting the ball, holding it, and dragging it back and forth to draw defenders, hold up play, then lay off: obviously my Man of the Match. The Blues tried hard, to little effect: Pongo and DI had good first halves, and Stuart Macdonald had a reasonable display on the right, but the player who looked as if he would have been most effective, Gordon Tago, was starved of the ball

on the left, yet still took on men and had several excellent runs and layoffs; he scored from a wonderful free-kick too, thus Tago is my Carloway Man of the Match.