

Eilean an Fhraoich Round 1 First Leg:

Back 2 (1) Carloway 0 (0)

Chris Macleod 9

Kevin 'Bloxy' Murray 64

At Coll.

7.6.10

Ref.: Billy Macdonald.

Gordon Craigie

*Stuart Macdonald Andrew 'Pongo' Maciver (capt.) Domhnall Mackay
Tom Lawrence Donnie Macphail Kenny 'Beag' MacIennan Murdo 'Squegg' Macleod
Gordon 'Tago' Macdonald*

Seumas Macleod Dan Crossley

An unpredictable team, the Blues. The storming 6-0 annihilation of North Uist on Saturday was followed by this low-key, flat display in which they failed to hit the target for the first time this season. Indeed, watching this made one wonder at times how they ever manage to score. The EaF format might be blamed, as Kevin 'Gochan' Macleod, Archie Macdonald and Darren Mackinnon were ineligible together with the inspirational Calum Moody, yet Stuart Macdonald and Tom Lawrence were two of their most effective participants.

On the night, apart from two horrifying lapses, the defence looked secure, except towards the end, when Carloway were coming forward, in an attempt to convert a vital away goal, but, up front, it was a no-show.

An inconclusive opening was ended on 9 minutes when Gochan robbed Domhnall Mackay on 20 metres as he hesitated over a through ball running towards the Carloway goal, then flicked it square behind a retreating Stuart Macdonald to Chris Macleod running into the box on the left. The ball was despatched neatly, low into Craigie's bottom left-hand corner.

For a 5 minute period, na Gormaich lost their shape and Back could have bagged another: Gochan miscued a header from 12 metres in front of goal, then another header, 16 metres out on the left, bounced high to rattle Craigie's left-hand post. The Blues regained their composure but despite having marginally more of the ball, could not force things through midfield to create chances, and seemed compelled to adopt the Tommy Docherty-Man Utd style: whatever you do, hold on to the ball. Hence Craigie to Domhnall, to Macdonald, to Squegg, to Domhnall, to Pongo, to Kenny Beag, to Domhnall, to Craigie.....

Seamus Macleod, Dan Crossley and Gordon Tago retreated in search of the ball, would receive it to feet, then run into an iron curtain of Ross Hall, David Ox and Jason Macleod, and a trademark Bacach ball would follow: fast forward to Inny Red or Euan Moley or fast, low and diagonal inside the backs for Chris Macleod or Murray Macleod to run on forward. A long-range shot from Crossley, a wide effort from MacPhail on the half-hour, and a 25 metre drive from Squegg were all Carloway could muster in the first half.

Back should have killed the game in the opening two minutes of the half. a neat flick left Jason Macleod free on the left to run in on goal but Craigie spread himself well and he dragged the ball wide of the far post. Then a

storming run on the right by Gochan left him free in the box, but he fired 2-3 metres over. Crossley and Macleod continued tirelessly up front for the Blues, but nothing was happening; Back were edging possession and creating the occasional chance, but generally the game had degenerated into a lacklustre stalemate.

Suddenly, second goal arrived: Bloxy won the ball in the air 20 metres out. His high looping header seemed to have been gathered safely by Craigie, under pressure from Inny Red, but, unexpectedly, he fumbled it forward and Bloxy, following up, didn't appear to connect cleanly but his trundling shot found the net, striking the prostrate Inny Red on the way.

Na Gormaich now committed themselves more and more, leaving huge gaps at the back, but to little effect: a few Tago runs, half a dozen inviting crosses, and a Pongo shot over, were all a resolute Bacach defence conceded. Indeed the best chance fell to the home side, on 83 minutes, when a surging break left Murray Macleod clear on the left but he failed to capitalise.

For an encounter between two of the in-form Lewis sides, this was strangely unexciting. Back certainly deserved the win but both teams will probably erase this contest from the tapes asap. Not that anyone was found wanting: Ross Hall ran his defence like clockwork and his passing continues to be exemplary, while Euan Moley and Inny Red were like granite in midfield. Their style prevailed: fast out of defence; spread fast, and the diagonal between defenders or over the top to run on to.

The Blues certainly battled hard, with Donnie Macphail and Tom Lawrence (Carloway Man of the Match) particularly effective, but their slower approach and its predictability: forwards chasing/ retreating to receive balls at feet, running from 30 metres out, allowed Back to group, regroup and combat. Dan Crossley and Seumas must sleep well at night after Carloway games!