

Lewis and Harris League:

Back 1 (0) Carloway 2 (2)

Colin Maclean 69

Fraser Macleod 9

Scott Macaulay 36

At Col Uarach.

Monday, 27.5.13.

Ref.: George Macaskill.

David Beaton

Seumas Macleod Calum Tom Moody Donald "D.I." MacIennan

Kevin "Barra" Macneil Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Billy Anderson Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod

(capt.) □ Dan Crossley

Scott Macaulay Fraser Macleod

Subs.: Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur (Dan Crossley) 42; Jamie Macdonald ☒ (Fraser Macleod) 66; Ben Smith (Kevin "Barra" Macneil) 74.

Subs. not used: James Anderson; David Macleod.

Yellow cards: Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod 90; Jamie Macdonald 90+4.

Until recently, Col Uarach must have ranked close behind Goathill as Carloway's least loved ground. Drubbings have been frequent: 1-4 on 2012; 2-7 the year before (in each of which nightmares the Blues' main striker tonight featured highly for the opposition); 2-3 in 2010; and so on. However, 2009 did provide a rare ray of sunshine for na Gormaich, a 5-4 win, thanks to two late crackers from Kenny "Beag" MacIennan, and the distaste for the location was finally exorcized on a dark night last September, in the dramatic shoot-out victory over West Side, in the Coop Final.

Carloway's catharsis of all their demons was complete seventeen days ago in a first Cup Final victory in 90 minutes at Goathill in over half a century - a 6-0 ABC demolition of their opponents this evening. They followed this triumph with a second win over the Bacachs, this time 4-0, in the JS on Friday last, Fraser Macleod providing another masterclass in deadly finishing. In the last two seasons Carloway seem to have progressed in strength in inverse proportion to Back's regression from the high of their title win in 2011, secured, ironically, in a 2-2 draw at Cnoc a' Choilich.

Two Bacach Cup wins did follow in 2012: 4-3 over West Side in the ABC and 5-1 over Ness in the JS; but by the time they faced the Blues at Garrabost in the Coop last September, some stalwarts were already missing: Martin Maclean (at Brora); Iain "Tohan" Macleod (at Fort William), while Hammer of the Blues, Kevin "Bloxy" Murray, only featured for 35 minutes as a substitute. Even then, it took a late equalizer from the head of Seumas Macleod. off a Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald cross from the left, to rescue Carloway, after a stunning rearguard action by a Ross Hall-led defence. Even Back's inspirational captain was absent in the sides' two previous encounters this season (first suspended; now out for the season with a back complaint); his left-back at Garrabost, Murdo "Gress" MacIennan, is now at Ness, and Fraser Macleod, of course, is at Cnoc a' Choilich.

However, na Gormaich themselves had absences: Domhnall Mackay and Kevin "Gochan" Macleod on the final game of their suspensions; Gus Maciver out for possibly 8 weeks with an ankle injury, though he could be heard all over the island offering advice from the sideline to his colleagues. Fortunately, Scott Macaulay, unavailable on Friday, had escaped from St. Kilda to partner Fraz Mac up front; Kevin "Barra" Macneil slotted into "Gochan's" role wide right; and Seumas Macleod did a fair impersonation of Maciver at the back. Ben Smith dropped back to the bench beside other young star, Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur, with Jamie Macdonald, James Anderson, and David Macleod.

It was already May 27th before we finally had what could pass for a mild summer's evening, though a stiff breeze was coming off Broadbay into the faces of the Bacachs in the first half. Previous results affected early play. Back were cagey: holding back; flooding defence and midfield; Colin Maclean deep; and one man forward. This suited Carloway, adopting their recently-favoured Barca style: laying balls off early at the back/midfield; moving into space for returns; quick surging; the early cross/ diagonal/ race for goal; shooting fast.

The actual contest started in the 9th minute: a fast pass down the right touchline reached the retreating "Barra" under pressure, 10 metres inside the Back half, to flick inwards, where the wind bent it back towards the Bacach goal, and Fraser Macleod was on it in a flash, behind the line on the right. He carried it into the right side of the box, then slotted a perfect striker's finish across the advancing James Macleod and inside the far post (0-1).

Immediately Back were under pressure: on 13 minutes "Dokus" was supplied down the right, reversed, and sent a deep left-foot cross for Fraz Mac to head wide of Macleod's left-hand post from 14 metres in the centre. Next, "Dokus" appeared on the bye-line, eluded his marker to creep in and his high cross saw Macleod brilliantly tip the ball away at full stretch from the lurking "Barra". "D.J." Macdonald then had to make a last-ditch saving tackle at the penalty spot on Macleod, on a Macaulay pass, before Back finally threatened; a Moody clearance blocked in the area leading to a moment of indecision, before an alert Beaton rushed forward to hold.

However, the Macleods and D.J. Macdonald were struggling to contain a varied, wind-assisted Blues' attack, whose wide men and midfield repeatedly fuelled twin irritants, Scott Macaulay and Fraser Macleod. On 20 minutes a thundering Macaulay low cross from the left bye-line was held securely by Macleod before Fraz Mac, bursting through the centre, was blocked on the edge of the box. On 25 minutes a "Dokus" free-kick on the right, 23 metres out, was flicked over the bar from the edge of the box by Crossley, before Macleod brilliantly parried over the bar a Macaulay drive from the left, 10 metres from the bye-line.

The keeper again had to be vigilant on 34 minutes when neat play on the left saw his diagonal from 24 metres out graze a defender's head before reaching the arriving Macleod, to volley into his arms from 12 metres. However, two

minutes later, the Bacachs' difficulties doubled: a searching high ball from Anderson, in the centre circle, found Macaulay racing into the box on the left, to bring down beautifully, then crash a left-foot drive low past a helpless Macleod from 12 metres (0-2).

The half ended with a flurry from Back: first, a "D.J." free-kick, on the left centre line, was brought down by Murray Macleod, in the left of the Carloway box; he twisted and turned to the bye-line, but his reverse, low cut-back was knocked past the near post. Moments later, "D.J." found space in the centre to shoot a couple of metres over Beaton's bar from 22 metres.

Half-Time: Back 0 Carloway 2

Despite the loss of Crossley with an ankle injury, na Gormaich continued, at first, in first-half mode, even though his replacement, "Tiger", was a left back/half: on 50 minutes a free-kick on the edge of the box, 14 metres from the right bye-line, led to a scramble in the Back box, then thwacked clearance into the Minch. On 56 minutes an indirect free-kick just inside the box saw Anderson blast a right-foot drive against the wall, before rebounding to "Sgweg", 24 metres out, to lift the ball high into the box for Fraz Mac to drive low into the arms of the diving Macleod to his right.

Three minutes later, a long forward high ball from "Sgweg" found Macleod breaking right, chased by Jason Macleod into the box, and as Macleod came towards him, from an acute right angle, he stroked the ball past the keeper's right from 12 metres, but wide of the far post. On 64 minutes he reprised this performance - winning the ball just inside the back half, racing forward, then slipping the ball wide to the right of the blocking Macleod, from the edge of the box - with the same end result.

However, the following five minutes experienced an inexorable sea-change in the game's ascendancy: first, Carloway's options were diminished further with the exit of their main striker with a heel injury, to be replaced by a holding midfielder, Jamie Macdonald; then, even worse for the Blues, three points suddenly had to be seriously defended. On 69 minutes an Ally "Tolsta" Maciver free-kick on the left centre line came back off Macdonald's head to a predatory Maclean on the right, just outside the box and his snapshot low right-foot drive gave Beaton no chance just inside his left-hand post (1-2).

Moments later a long clearance from the Blues' area found "Dokus" in the centre circle and he turned to release Macaulay breaking on the left, but Macleod raced from his goal-line to block on the edge of the box. However, the match impetus had shifted markedly to Back's assertion of midfield control, to push Carloway onto the defensive, dependent on the fast break. Nevertheless, a Macleod/Moody/Maclennan back-line, under pressure, remained resolute, to keep the front-line outside their box and deny the Bacachs any golden-edge opportunity.

On 72 minutes a break down the left fed inwards to Jason Macleod on the left edge of the box but his turn and shot to the near post was safely held by

Beaton. Five minutes later a "Tolsta" free-kick near the same spot was driven right-foot high and wide of Beaton's left-hand post.

Commitment forward almost rewarded a fast break by the na Gormaich, Macaulay winning the ball on the right halfway line, and slipping it to "Dokus", who, in turn, tricked his way down the line to send a high forward diagonal behind the line for "Sqweg" to ghost on to. He checked 12 metres from goal, then squared left to the unmarked Ben Smith but Macleod read his right-foot shot exquisitely to spread and block, the rebound falling to "Sqweg's" left; however, his mishit chip was blocked and cleared.

Back's last reasonable chance came on 85 minutes when "D.J.", on the right edge of the box, was fed from the right but his dipping quick-fire shot bounced dangerously across the 6-metre line and wide of the far post. Despite 5 minutes of added-on time, interminable time-wasting in corner kick areas by expert shielders-of-the-ball, "Dokus" and Scott Macaulay, and a granite back four reduced final Bacach efforts to long, high balls into the box, no concern to an alert David Beaton.

Indeed, the best chance in extra-time, ironically, fell to the Blues when a long Anderson forward pass left was won by Smith on the left touch-line, broke back to the arriving Anderson, and his clever reverse and chip found "Dokus" 16 metres out on the left of the Back box. He took one step inwards, then sent a low right-foot drive just outside Macleod's right-hand post.

Full-Time: Back 1 Carloway 2

A massive win for Carloway, of course. If any island side has League pretensions, this is a ground, like Barvas, that they must visit with apprehension, as Sgoil nan Loch used to be. Such fears were justified tonight. To visit, then leave with three points, is a gigantic accomplishment, however achieved. How often has the clichè, "A game of two halves" been quoted this season?

The Blues can say that they were missing three key players tonight, four on Friday. Yet, after the first 20 minutes, they still managed to control the game on Friday, and $\frac{2}{3}$ of tonight's game, which certainly demonstrates strength in depth. However, just as the arrival of Dan Crossley versus the Siarachs (and Ali "Barvas" Macleod's departure) transformed that game's progress, so tonight his departure led to, at least, a change of team attitude, sensed by the opposition immediately. The substitution of Fraser Macleod compounded this game-shift, removing a constant high-speed irritant that you must always keep far from your goalkeeper.

Fortunately, na Gormaich have one of the best interchangeable back-lines on the island - Maciver/Moody/Maclennan/Macleod/Macarthur - resilient under repeated pressing, as they had to be for at least 25 tiring minutes tonight, and no doubt on Saturday at Culbokie, but, as in the ABC Cup Final, the endless ingenuity and imagination of Murray Macleod throughout and more direct confrontational assaults of "D.J." Macdonald, Chris Macleod, and Ally "Tolsta"

Maciver later, they could not unlock the door often enough to threaten the safest pair of hands in Lewis. Few worries, then, at the moment at the back for the Blues, despite the gnawing pain of Gus Maciver's absence.

On Saturday, Domhnall Mackay should bring holding power to midfield and Kevin "Gochan" Macleod wide pace and electric finishing on the right, but the main worries presently are possible tiredness after John "Nobby" Smith's wedding in Beaulieu on Friday; the nasty right-leg ankle injury to Dan Crossley, who does an enormous amount of skilful work, a lot of it unremarked, down Carlaway's complete left-hand side; and the raking stud marks on the back of Fraser Macleod's lower leg.

Back Man of the Match: Murray Macleod.

Carlaway Man of the Match: Calum Tom Moody.