

Lewis and Harris League:

Westside 1 (1) Carloway 3 (1)

Duncan Maclean 16

Fraser Macleod 15, 84

Seumas Macleod 59

At Barvas.

Friday, 16.8.13.

Ref.: George Macaskill.

Standside line judge: Robert Mackay.

Farside line judge: Neil Macritchie.

David Beaton

Calum Tom Moody Gus Maciver Donald "D.I." MacIennan

Seumas Macleod ☒ Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod (capt.)

Dan Crossley

Scott Macaulay Fraser Macleod ☒

Sub.: Kevin "Barra" Macneill (Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald) 90+1.

Subs. not used: Craig Hacker; Calum Mackay; Ben Smith; Jack Buchanan.

Yellow cards: Seumas Macleod 47; Fraser Macleod 67.

Scott Graham

Dan Macphail Colin George Morrison Kenny "Parry" Macleod Donald "Spike" Smith Màrtainn Shields

Duncan Maclean Donnie "Noe" Smith Ally Williamson Gordon Campbell

Gordon Craigie

Subs. used: Timmy Hunter (Colin George Morrison) 77; Cameron Macdonald (Màrtainn Shields) 77.

The season had now run its course to that point when Championships had to be decided. In remarkably similar circumstances to that September night two years ago versus Back at Cnoc a' Choilich, the "*Fiat voluntas Tua*" moment was upon na Gormaich. Most likely, this was the most important West Lewis derby ever, when the strongest squads both clubs have ever had collided here, the third occasion this season, to clarify the destination of the 2013 Championship. Every serious footballer must dream of participating in such an occasion; anyone in awe of such an event or doubtful that they can perform should take up board games.

Unfortunately, both teams were weakened to some degree: Carloway, of course, lacked Domhnall Mackay (on honeymoon) and Kevin "Gochan" Macleod on the first of his 3-game suspension, while midfield *animateur*, Billy Anderson, had to visit Skye; Kenny "Beag" MacIennan was no longer on the island. West's Johnny Wallace and John Campbell were off scoring in a different sense in Ibiza; D.J. Macleod was unavailable; and the Blues thanked the heaven themselves that Ali "Barvas" Macleod and Innes Iain Morrison opted to suffer Avicii in Glasgow. Some people have their priorities all wrong!

Carloway's main concern, therefore, apart from the opposition(!) was in midfield: fortunately Seumas Macleod agreed to fly up from Glasgow to bring solidity and class to their right midfield, while young star, Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur, was given the mighty task of filling the absent Mackay's boots as the Makelele shield in the centre, though he was consoled by the presence of the Yangtse Dam behind him in Gus Maciver.

The Siarachs' selection dilemmas were rather more pronounced: Johnny Wallace could be covered by Ally Williamson réprising his partnership with Donnie "Noe" Smith in central defence, while the midfield spread remained strong in Donald "Spike" Smith, Kenny "Parry" Macleod, and Colin George Morrison, with Màrtainn Shields adopting "Barvas's" role on the right; but this seemed to leave Scott Graham overworked up front, without Innes Iain Morrison's or D.J.Macleod's input.

Remember, West **HAD** to win tonight, too! In fact, the task ahead could not have been clearer for both aspirants: a Carloway win guaranteed them the Championship. A draw would eliminate the Siarachs from the League race, but the Blues would still need two points from their remaining fixtures, both at home, to Lochs and Point, to be certain of League success. West **MUST** win to remain challengers, then win all their remaining fixtures, away against Ness and Lochs; and at home to Athletic, then hope that the Blues lost to both Lochs and Point. Meanwhile, the Champions, Athletic, lurked in the shadows, hoping both might slip up somewhere along the way, before their own visit to Barvas on September 5th, in what might turn out to be the most important fixture of them all. No pressure then! As all Championship races should be, it was going as close to the wire as possible!

A huge crowd belatedly assembled, suggesting that many people were unaware that from mid-August, kick-off times reverted to 6.30 p.m. A blustery, cool sou'westerly greeted the players, though the cloud was broken and bright autumnal sunlight shone low across the ground for the opening hour. Immediately the Blues were stymied by a piece of tactical brilliance from Grant Hunter, identified by POD: Scott Graham forsook his customary spearhead role, instead reincarnating Hidegkuti as deep-lying centre-forward just inside his own half, right. Maciver let him go, electing to remain on zonal duty, with "D.I." as Tonto, mainly on his left. Unexpectedly, Morrison and Macphail came forward, right and left, to sit inside the Carloway half, tying Maciver, and preventing trademark surges from Moody and Macleod, fundamental items in the Carloway success story.

Meanwhile, "D.I." and Crossley soon wished Ali "Barvas" could have made it after all, as neat triangular play from "Spike", Morrison, and Shields frequently liberated the pacy right-winger to the bye-line to deliver dangerous cross-balls across the face of the Blues' goal. However, lack of Siarach strike-power, allied with Blues' inability to enforce their customary powerful pushes forward *en masse*, and reliance on the long ball, led, initially, to few close, or clear-cut chances.

On 9 minutes Crossley broke clear down the left past two opponents, out of his own half, then turned inside, but his low drive from 24 metres went straight to Craigie. After 13 minutes, Moody won the ball on the right, midway within his own half, then supplied Fraser Macleod with an early ball just inside the Siarach half. He squirmed round and outside Williamson and charged forward but his high, swirling cross cleared the bar. Two minutes later and Carloway created a goal out of nothing: "Sqweg" sent an almighty free-kick from just inside his own half straight forward, high into the West box. An untidy aerial challenge between Moody and Graham saw the ball break square left off the back of the falling Graham's shoulder, and the predatory Fraz Mac, hovering by Craigie's right-hand post chopped it home with a high, swinging right foot (**0-1**).

The celebrations had barely concluded before the Barvas men retaliated. A perfect Morrison free-kick from midway within the Carloway half, close to the right touchline, cleared the defensive line to find Maclean, unmarked by the far post, 8 metres out, and he did not even have to jump to send an exquisite reverse-header wide of the exposed Beaton and into the left of his goal (**1-1**).

For a few minutes the Blues wobbled alarmingly, as West gained an initiative. On 20 minutes a beautiful Barca-style move out of the right of the Siarach defence saw the breaking Donnie "Noe" supply Shields, back to Smith, to Morrison, to Macphail, to Shields freed to the right bye-line, and his deep cross was just too high for Beaton as it whizzed across the 6-metre box. Beautiful!

Carloway steadied, then a Macaulay throw-in on the right sent Fraser Macleod charging behind the line to send an early low cross square into the Siarach box, 16 metres out, but Williamson reacted first to boot it clear from the feet of the approaching "Dokus". After the half-hour two

dangerous Morrison free-kicks, both 24 metres out on the left touchline, made the Blues' defence sweat. First, a high right-footer to the far post saw Beaton challenged by Macphail and "D.I." hooked the ball past his left-hand post for a corner. Williamson just failed to connect with the low corner to the near post, before, moments later, an identical free-kick was met by Graham 10 metres from goal and Beaton had to flick the ball over his left bar. This time the corner came in high under the bar and Beaton had to double-punch the ball high upwards over his bar for yet another corner.

On 38 minutes, a swiftly-taken "Sqweg" free-kick sent "Dokus" forward, only to be taken down by Graham 22 metres out in the centre. His right-foot strike cleared the wall but crept a metre outside Craigie's right-hand post. Just before half-time, Macaulay's tenacity at the left centre-line supplied "Tiger" to free "Dokus" running left, but his cross broke for a corner. From the "Dokus" corner, Graham had to block smartly beside the far post from Macaulay, before another Blues' surge on the left saw Fraz Mac check, midway within the Siarach half, before sending a deep searching cross for Macaulay to control, 12 metres out right, then smash off the top of the outside of West's left-hand post. Right on the whistle another Shields run and cross on the right was met low by Macphail, 10 metres out by the near post, under pressure. The ball spun up high and backwards, and Beaton had to race to touch it on to the top of his right-hand bar and wide. Phew!

Half-time: **Westside 1 Carloway 1**

Quite a half, with both sides creating, and being denied, worthy chances. Immediately, a Maclean free-kick from the left halfway line had to be punched out by an alert Beaton, to fall behind Morrison on the penalty spot, but he somehow managed to spin round, then send a neat overhead kick back to the left of goal, but it was too tight a situation for Graham to connect properly, 8 metres out by Carloway's right-hand post, and he could only flick it into the arms of the grateful Beaton. On 57 minutes another slick West move on the left almost delivered, with Campbell breaking up a Blues' surge through the middle, then moving it high out to Maclean, who in turn fed in to "Parry", who charged, the ball then going out left to Shields who tricked his way past his marker, and his low cross, 12 metres from the bye-line, found Morrison by the near post, who connected with a low left-footer that flashed just outside Beaton's right-hand post.

Instantly na Gormaich punished the home side, as the ball broke off Campbell to Macaulay, 10 metres inside the Siarach half. The *trequartista* broke left, then midway inside the half sent a delicate left-foot chip diagonally forward towards the penalty spot, where Craigie and Fraz Mac clashed in pursuit, the ball then breaking back out away from both. Seumas Macleod did not hesitate but burst forward like lightning past Williamson to stab a right-foot poke home between Smith and Maclean (1-2).

Once again, Westside had an instant opportunity to draw level, when neat play on the right released Morrison coming across along the right edge of the box, but his powerful left-foot volley cleared the right of the bar by a metre. Inspiration now flooded the Blues with adrenalin and their traditional power play emerged as Morrison's and Macphail's presence could no longer combat runs from Moody and Macleod. Also, realizing that losing heavily was no worse than losing by a goal, West's effective straitjacket structure was increasingly abandoned as even Maclean and the midfield pushed further and further forward to gain some breakthrough: an ideal scenario for the Blues now to sit back, let them come, then initiate runs from Crossley, "Dokus", and Fraz Mac into the yawning gaps in the Barvas half of the ground; dangerous too, of course.

However, the chances now proliferated: after 62 minutes just such a Crossley run through the centre saw him slip the ball right to the unmarked Fraz Mac moving into the box, but just as the

striker went to connect, the ball bobbed, and he volleyed thin air instead. Moments later, a long low clearance from Seumas Macleod, midway within his own half, allowed his namesake to outpace Campbell, then tip the ball wide of the outrushing Craigie to the left, but as he controlled and fired the ball goal-wards, 14 metres out wide left, Campbell somehow got back to block for a corner. In the 70th minute a "Sweg" corner on the left was headed back to him and his swift return allowed Fraz Mac to run across the line but head just over from 10 metres. A minute later and a high diagonal from Crossley found the striker yet again moving into the box, this time on the right, but his powerful volley cleared the bar by a metre.

Just as well D.J. Maclean was in the crowd as the tension ratcheted up second by second and the game moved into its last ten minutes. A scintillating Crossley run down the left ended with him cutting inside, but his long, low shot from 24 metres went straight to the keeper. In the 82nd minute a "Sqweg" free-kick on the left touchline, 25 metres out, was curled in beautifully to Seumas Macleod running in by the far post to outjump Maclean, but his head-flick slipped agonisingly just outside Craigie's left-hand post.

Two minutes later and the Championship trophy was *en route* to the Doune Braes. A West surge down the right ended with a brilliant Crossley tackle on Maclean turning in from the touch-line, 20 metres out, the ball breaking outwards to "Sqweg" to push forward to Macaulay racing into the Siarach half. He, in turn, squared the early ball to "Dokus" coming through the centre and he transmitted a glorious low left diagonal to Fraser Macleod breaking off Williamson into the box. The striker checked inwards, moved across his marker, and blasted a right-foot Exocet high to the helpless Craigie's left (1-3). What a cracker for your 50th of the Season!

A minute later and he almost added to his tally, as a "Sqweg" stab from the right centre line saw him race once more off his marker, move into the left of the box, drawing Craigie, but then send his cut-back beyond the far post.

Full-time: Westside 1 Carloway 3

"Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer by --- " these sons of Carloway! Yes, Will Shakespeare was clearly a Blues' fan. Thankfully, for Blues' *aficionados*, the three points were secured on the night, and another fortnight of tension did not have to be endured, after a second half here tonight, which seemed, in itself, to last as long as the Renaissance. Till the 59th minute, this was a delicately-balanced, keenly-contested duel, which could easily have gone either way, or neither, and either side would have been worthy winners.

Westside are like Clough's great Forest sides of the 70s: dogged and industrious; everyone a performer; and no one is ever posted missing within the tightest squad on the island, with Màrtainn Shields, Colin George Morrison, and Dan Macphail particular thorns in Carloway's flesh tonight. They clearly deserve a Championship next.

Regarding the Blues, however, tonight, once again, it was glaringly obvious, that gifted and insightful though "Dokus", Dan Crossley, Seumas Macleod, and "Gochan" are, it is the hard work by them and around them that has delivered the platform to secure the Championship, stemming from gneissian consistency in a defence built round the granite keystone in the cupola, Gus Maciver, in full Terminator mode this evening (with Scott Macaulay closely following him, as immovable force and third-quarter creator). And this, in turn, enabled faultless displays from David Beaton behind Maciver and Calum Tom Moody and "D.I" MacIennan flanking him; also, from Seumas Macleod, "Sqweg" and "Tiger", and Dan Crossley, right, centre, and left, retreating as required. This meant, though Westside's unexpected game-plan enmeshed na Gormaich for an hour, it weakened their attack and mainly delivered more possession and territory; the best of the chances still fell to Carloway, especially Fraser

Macleod. Though Carloway did not shine in the first half, there always seemed an underlying confidence in their selfless approach in forward movement, riding pressure, to break fast and wide via Seumas Macleod, Macaulay, and Crossley; or over/through the middle using "Sqweg" and "Dokus", later Moody, to release the uncontrollable Fraser Macleod life-force up front. Even John Terry or Rio Ferdinand in their prime would not relish the task of confronting him!

Carloway Man of the Match: Seumas Macleod.

Westside Man of the Match: Colin George Morrison.