

Lewis and Harris League:

Carloway 1 (1) Westside 1 (0)

Jack Buchanan 34

John Campbell 67

Ref.: Stuart Macleod.

At Cnoc a Choilich.

Friday, 25.4.14.

CARLOWAY:

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

David Beaton

Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Gus Maciver Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur

Leigh Johnson Billy Anderson Dan Crossley Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod Archie
Macdonald

Fraser Macleod Jack Buchanan

Subs.: Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald (Billy Anderson) 57; Kevin "Gochan" Macleod (Jack Buchanan) 74; Kevin "Barra" Macneil (Leigh Johnson) 86; Donald "D.I." MacIennan (Dan Crossley) 90+2.

Sub. not used: Gordon Craigie.

Yellow cards: Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur 35; Billy Anderson 47.

WESTSIDE:

Manager: Murchadh Macdonald.

Chris Adams Scott Graham

Martin Stewart Dan Macphail Ally Williamson Colin George Morrison Ali "Barvas"
Macleod

Duncan Maclean (capt.) Donnie "Noe" Smith Campbell Macdonald
Peter Macaskill

Subs.: Innes Iain Morrison (Chris Adams) 58; John Campbell (Colin George Morrison) 63; Martainn Shields (Martin Stewart) 73; D.J. Macleod (Ali Williamson) 82.

Sub. not used: Gordon Campbell.

Yellow card: Ally Williamson 78.

Tonight, the venue of choice had to be Cnoc a' Choilich, for the first West Side battle - sorry, derby - of 2014. This was to be the first meeting of Lewis's deadliest rivals since that fateful evening in Barvas last August, when Carloway secured their first-ever League title on the turf of their near-neighbours, when, after an even 1-1 first-half, a piece of opportunism by Seumas Macleod and a rocket from Fraser Macleod, brought glory south to Carloway.

The omens for tonight's collision were propitious: so far, neither side had lost any of their opening games, the Siarachs overcoming Harris and United without reply and the Blues demolishing the Hearachs also, between grinding out a 1-1 draw at Creagan Dubh and last-minute victory at Garrabost.

Leigh Johnson, Archie Macdonald, and Jack Buchanan had allowed the Blues to forget rapidly the loss of Scott Macaulay, Calum Tom Moody, and

Seumas Macleod, while Westside were adjusting easily to the departure of the inspirational Donald "Spike" Smith eastwards to Point. However, Johnnie Wallace was still out injured and the position of James Macleod remained unclear, but much-travelled danger-man, Chris Adams, had come in up front to partner ace goal-getter, Scott Graham. An additional surprise tonight was the appearance on the Carloway bench of the Blues' own one-man Exocet, Kevin "Gochan" Macleod, game-changer par excellence. On paper, then, the sides looked well-matched; defeat for either at this early stage would be a body blow to Championship hopes, especially with Athletic opening their campaign in rampant form.

A strong westerly might have been thought to be a first-half advantage for na Gormaich, but it was the Barvas men who hit the ground running and the enormous crowd awaited a *réprise* of the opening half from last year's corresponding fixture, in which the Siarachs had dominated the opening 45 minutes. However, that night they had also managed to miss a hatful of chances, before falling victim to a "Frazmac" thunderbolt and late penalty in the second.

Tonight, the Carloway midfield and back-line were immediately driven off-balance. conceding a spate of needless free-kicks, which earned West nothing, before Morrison made the right bye-line but his bullet-cross whizzed head-high across the Carloway 6-metre line before Adams and Graham could arrive. On 5 minutes a beautifully-flighted "Sqweg" free-kick from the right centre-line curled over a crowded West penalty area with no takers, before a Duncan Maclean corner after 11 minutes on Beaton's left dropped low within the Blues' 6-metre box, bounced uncontrollably high off Graham and was grabbed by an alert Beaton.

On 19 minutes Ali "Barvas" controlled a difficult through ball from Morrison on the right, checked, and laid off to Graham on his right, and he in turn spun inwards to shoot low from 22 metres but Beaton read him. Moments later it was Williamson's turn, midway within the Carloway half, to loft in a high ball from the right touchline for Graham, under pressure from Mackay 12 metres out, to back-head towards Beaton. After 22 minutes a West free-kick, midway within their own half, was headed on to Martin Stewart, unmarked on the left. He carried it to the left edge of the box, then as Beaton moved out to narrow him down, lofted a left-foot lob over the keeper - but just beyond the far junction of bar and post.

As the Siarachs continued to threaten, Beaton had to excel twice more: a Morrison corner on his right dipping expertly under the bar was palmed away for another corner, before a Maclean free-kick on the right edge of the box cleared the wall and had to be flicked over. As at Garrabost, the Blues' back-line, generalised by Maciver, was holding fast and eventually the Blues settled and battle really commenced in midfield.

A Carloway break on the right led to a long Johnson throw-in, 18 metres from the bye-line, bouncing across the Siarach box, where "Frazmac" met it first to hook it rightwards towards goal, but Macaskill reacted instantly to push it over

the bar. On 33 minutes a Crossley free-kick, directly in front of goal 22 metres out, was held at full stretch by a careful keeper.

A minute later and bad luck led to the opener: Smith and Maclean got into a fankle on the edge of the box and as the ball spun loose, Buchanan nipped in and his right-foot snapshot flashed straight to the goalkeeper's nightmare position: low to the left, just inside the post. Again, Macaskill read it beautifully and got down flat to block, but just as it reached him, the ball bobbed up, hit his shoulder, and soared into the top of the net **(1-0)**.

Both defences continued to remain sound, with the midfields cancelling each other out; chances evaporated. On 41 minutes a mazy Crossley run took him from the centre circle diagonally down the left; he checked at the left corner of the box, cut in, then sent a ferocious drive low inside Macaskill's right-hand post, but again the young keeper anticipated excellently to drop flat to hold.

Half-time: Carloway 1 Westside 0

Respect for the opposition made battle strategies clear: danger men were targetted. The creativity of Crossley, "Sqweg", Anderson, Morrison, and Macphail was sacrificed to game-plans. Campbell Macdonald had spent the first half attached to Fraser Macleod: Ally Williamson as Makélélé on Dan Crossley, while Archie Macdonald stood on Ali "Barvas's" feet throughout. The latter did escape on 49 minutes to send over a glorious deep cross from the right touch-line, midway within the Carloway half, which Graham met with a looping reverse header, 16 metres out by the far post, but it crept wide and high. Five minutes later "Sqweg" supplied the diagonal for Johnson to get behind the line and make the right bye-line but Smith reacted like lightning in front of goal to prevent his low hard cross reaching Buchanan.

As the hour approached, West knew they had to shake off the strait jacket in the centre of the pitch and up the pace; another rush of Maclean free-kicks rained into the Carloway box. On 66 minutes an Ali "Barvas" run led to another deep cross which Beaton had to rush from goal to prevent reaching Graham. A minute later and the teams were even: yet another free-kick midway within the Blues' half was flighted in neatly by Maclean, to be met by a collection of heads. As it broke back behind the line to the right, for once na Gormaich's defence was slow to react and John Campbell got there first to slip a low shot home from 14 metres, to the right of the advancing Beaton **(1-1)**.

Naturally, this spurred Carloway to renewed action. On 69 minutes a right-foot drive by "Frazmac", 24 metres from goal, had to be watched carefully past by Macaskill. Four minutes later, a killer diagonal from "Sqweg", in the centre circle, released Johnson moving inside, inside Maclean, behind Smith, to carry the ball under pressure into the box but his snap right-foot drive flew a metre outside the Siarachs' left-hand post. After 76 minutes a low "Dokus" cross from midway within the Siarach half, out on the right touchline, just beat "Frazmac" as the ball raced across the West box, 16 metres out. On 79 minutes a "Sqweg" free-kick from the centre-line initiated an incredible melée

within the crowded West box, as two drives in front of goal were eventually blocked, one on the line, the ball then spinning off to the right, before being lifted back in and fired over.

The last frenetic ten minutes were an orgy of desperate attacking, brutal tackling, and last-ditch defending. In the 85th minute Archie Macdonald had to head a dangerous cross clear. Three minutes later Ali "Barvas" was sandwiched by Mackay and Crossley on the left edge of the Carloway box, leading to serious injury for the Blues' midfielder, then a hotly-disputed free-kick, before Fraser Macleod headed Duncan Maclean's beautifully-flighted cross clear.

Full-time: Carloway 1 Westside 1

This was an intense war of attrition, indeed, which combined all the best - and perhaps the worst - elements of Serie A in the 70s and 80s: virtuoso displays of skill and control, from Dan Crossley and Ali "Barvas" Macleod especially; game-changing insight and delivery from Billy Anderson, Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod, Colin George Morrison, Dan Macphail, and Duncan Maclean; the tightest of marking from Gus Maciver, Archie Macdonald, Ally Williamson, and Campbell Macdonald; and defensive solidity - and brutal tackling - by the two back-lines of Mackay/ Maciver/ Macarthur and Macdonald/ Smith/ Maclean. Captains Courageous, Domhnall Mackay and Duncan Maclean, certainly led their troops by example, but the teams' styles didn't really contrast, and this led to dangerous moments but distinctly few *"He should have scored"* occasions. Indeed, the best opportunities seemed to arrive from dead-ball situations, unsurprising with experts like "Sgweg", Ali "Barvas", and Duncan Maclean on the park. So, no failures on either side tonight; no one posted missing, but it was this appetite to compete, to fight for the ball, that inversely led to the dearth of golden chances. Both sides look capable of significant achievement this season.

Westside Man of the Match: Duncan Maclean

Carloway Man of the Match: Domhnall Mackay