

Cuach a' Cho-op Final :

Westside 2 (0) Carloway 0 (0)

Ali "Barvas" Macleod 60, 90

At Goathill Park, Stornoway.

Saturday, 23.8.14, 6.00 p.m.

Referee: Calum "Chancey" Macleod

Stand-side Line Judge: Kenneth "Bugsy" Smith

Far-side Line Judge: D.J.Maclean

Fourth official: Neil Macritchie

MANAGER: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

Gordon Craigie

Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Phil Macleod Donald "D.I." Maclennan

Kevin "Gochan" Macleod Lee Johnson Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Kenny "Beag" Maclennan

Archie "Statto" MacDonald

Jack Buchanan Kenny "Dokus" MacDonald

Subs.: Murdo "Squegg" Macleod (Lee Johnson) 52.

Subs. not used: Ross "Tiny" Maclean; Mark Macleod; Kevin "Barra" Macneil, Josh Harris.

Yellow cards: Domhnall Mackay 77; Donald "D.I." Maclennan 81 Kevin "Gochan" Macleod 89.

Red card: Archie "Statto" MacDonald 83

MANAGER: Murdo "Murchadh" Macdonald

Ali "Barvas" Macleod

Martainn Shields Dan Macphail Colin George Morrison Scott Graham Ali Williamson Jamie Sullivan

Shaun "Lefty" Macdonald Donnie "No" Smith Duncan Maclean (capt.)

Peter Macaskill

Subs.: Luke Mackay (Martainn Shields) 52; Douglas Bryson (Duncan Maclean) 63.

Subs. not used: Iain Gillies; Andy "Barvas" Macleod.

Yellow cards: Scott Graham 33; Douglas Bryson 60.

After their collective "Ice Bucket Challenge" last Wednesday, Carloway arrived this evening in the "Big Smoke" with all the enthusiasm of tumbril occupants during the Reign of Terror in Paris, 1789-93. Things had certainly fallen apart, but were the Blues' hopes for 2014 definitely over? Was anything to be salvaged from the wreckage of the 2014 campaign? Till August 2nd, only three weeks earlier (!), the Blues had had only one really disappointing result (0-5 in the ABC Cup Final); the 0-1 League defeat at Garrabost had been unlucky; 1-3 in the Jock Stein at Creagan Dubh a hiccup. No team wins every game - even Manchester City, Real Madrid, Bayern Munich, and so on, must lose, sometimes surprisingly. Otherwise, the Blues had been confident, aggressive, organised, etc.; one of the top three sides on the island, vying to retain their Championship.

However, the seeds of their decline may have been sown ten days earlier at Fivepenny with the loss of the talismanic Iain Angus "Gus" Maciver. No team can suffer the loss of such quality undiminished. Nevertheless, this yawning abyss in central defence might have been cemented over by a re-arranged line-up which still looked intimidating and trophy-worthy - inspirational Ironman Mackay; safe-as-houses Beaton; their own Andoni Goikoetxea in Donald "D.I." MacIennan; the uncontrollable Jack Flash Buchanan systematically shooting down opponents with bullets supplied by *animateur*, Dan Crossley. Who knows what might have transpired were it not for the added blows a malevolent Lady Fortune visited upon them at the Tulloch Caledonian Stadium: Dan Crossley's and David Beaton's 90-degree turn and exit stage left for the rest of the season.

Continuing nagging injury to other central midfielders, Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald, Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod, and Billy Anderson, eviscerated the crucial engine room that any successful club requires. Knock-on effects like continual personnel change and re-arrangement and use of inexperienced youth inevitably followed. Results nose-dived as players attempted to learn new formats. *Esprit de corps* plummeted even further.

And so na Gormaich trudged into Goathill tonight after four dismal defeats, made more excruciating by the nature of the losses, rather than their scale. The estimable Phil Macleod still held the line between Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur and "D.I.", but John "Wee John" Macdonald was cup-tied with lochdar Saints, therefore "Dokus" became Jack Buchanan's strike partner; in midfield, Lee Johnson stepped left beside the captain and Kenny "Beag" MacIennan to allow the explosive Kevin "Gochan" Macleod to spark the entire right, in front of "Tiger". Thankfully, the much-missed "Squegg" appeared on the bench, alongside Kevin "Barra" Macneil, Ross "Tiny" Maclean, Mark Macleod, and Josh Harris.

A few rays of sunshine did greet the Blues: the Siarachs' Campbell Macdonald, Gordon Campbell, Martin Stewart, and Innes Iain Morrison were unavailable, though some replacements were predictable: Shaun "Lefty" Macdonald for Macdonald in left defence and Martainn Shields for Stewart at left half/wing. Dan Macphail returned in left midfield with Ali "Barvas" Macleod moving forward into Morrison's slot and young Jamie Sullivan debuting at right half/wing. Fifteen-year-old Luke Mackay was in the bull-pen.

Nevertheless, Carloway opened purposefully in coherent La Liga-style, edging early play in possession and territory, and keen to move forward. Immediately, Maclean and Donnie "No" had to move smartly to cut out two dangerous forward crosses before a breaking ball in 11 minutes allowed "Lefty" a clear view of goal on the left, but his daisy-cutter from 22 metres went straight to Craigie. In 14 minutes a reckless "D.I." tackle on Ali "Barvas" just outside the right corner of the Carloway box led to a Maclean free-kick clearing the bar by a metre. Two minutes later a similar infringement on Buchanan by "Lefty" resulted in a "Dokus" free-kick coming back off

the wall before Maclean blocked his attempt from the rebound. As Ali "Barvas" continued to deceive the Blues' back-line, another trip on him in 19 minutes, 20 metres from goal on the left, saw Shields hit the wall.

Broken play followed, before Carloway eventually charged rapidly into the right-side of the West half. A glorious cross-field de Boer from MacDonald found "Dokus" on the right performing perfect Dugarry control before supplying Buchanan in the centre, but his drive from 20 metres sailed past Macaskill's right-hand post. "Tiger" was head-to-head with Shields, while Phil Macleod covered "D.I.", who was given the impossible task of subduing Ali "Barvas", but, as in the League game, the midfield struggled to pierce the central West midfield, and "Gochan" and Buchanan were starved. At times Shields and Sullivan lay so deep, Westside operated with six men across the centre, and with Macphail and Colin George relentlessly roaming and industrious, Johnson and MacDonald were drawn into a central morass, which left Mackay stymied by the intractable Williamson.

In 32 minutes a Buchanan feed from the left centre-line diagonally forward released Kenny "Beag" to surge forward but his hard low drive from 22 metres left Macaskill untroubled. A minute later a "Dokus" free-kick, midway within the West half, on the left touch-line, was curled in dangerously under Macaskill's bar, forcing the keeper to punch out high.

However, in 37 minutes a Williamson cross-field pass allowed Macphail to come into the Blues' half strongly, then transmit the ball on straight to the breaking Shields. He made the bye-line but his hard, low squared cross just beat the arriving "Barvas" in front of goal to reach Sullivan by the far post, but his instant drive went high over the bar. Two minutes from the interval it was Johnson's turn to test his dead-ball skills from 30 metres, but his careful, low free-kick went straight to Macaskill. In added-on time, a Maclean free-kick from the centre circle was headed on by "Barvas" on the penalty spot but Craigie charged out to clutch it ahead of Williamson.

Half-time: Westside 0 Carloway 0

The enterprising opening had swiftly become mired in a standard Cup Final template of stalemated mid-fields, denial of opposition creativity by fair means or foul (usually the latter), and grinding back-lines. Priority number one was not to lose a goal; scoring one was secondary. Craigie and Macaskill were underworked. That said, na Gormaich's approach evinced an attitude immeasurably more optimistic than that at Barvas three days before.

Immediately, the breakthrough beckoned. A Macilroy breaker, from Kenny "Beag" on the centre-line, allowed Jack Flash to ghost inside "Lefty" to the right edge of the box but his low shot swept across goal and beyond the far post. On 50 minutes a Colin George free-kick on the Carloway right, 22 metres from the bye-line, was reverse-headed by Graham, 16 metres out by the far post, but again Craigie reacted first, to claim the ball high, under pressure from Williamson. On 57 minutes another

Morrison free-kick on the left centre-line was met on the left of the Carloway box by Graham, but his reversed, squared header was head-lobbed high over the bar by Mackay.

On the hour neat play by Sullivan on the Blues' left, 18 metres from the bye-line, ended with Craigie stretching high to hold his lob/cross by the far post. A moment later the simplest of hesitations initiated the latest chapter in na Gormaich's catalogue of misery. As "D.I." looked downfield, just outside the left edge of the box, Shields plunged in to block his delivery. The ball ricocheted behind the defender, and the winger reacted first to whip a low hard cross square across goal. Ali "Barvas" arrived ahead of "Tiger" and Macleod to send the most exquisite of right-foot back-healers past the unfortunate Craigie (**0-1**). Wow! Goal of the season material!

The opinion of the Carloway defence is unrecorded, but they were still wobbling two minutes later when a high ball forward down the Siarach left glanced backwards off the unfortunate "D.I.'s" head over Macleod for his namesake and Macphail to move in rapidly towards the box, 2-on-1 on the keeper. Craigie was out in a flash to block "Barvas's" drive brilliantly, the ball spinning out to his left, where Macphail met it first time but sent it roaring across the Minch.

However, a ship in danger of drifting was immediately righted by Mackay and Macleod and Carloway unexpectedly re-discovered an impetus and drive sadly lacking in their past few games. In 67 minutes a "Squegg" free-kick from the centre circle was glanced on to Mackay but his header from 16 metres was safely clawed away to his right by Macaskill. Two minutes a similar free-kick from the same player initiated a *melée* in the West box, the ball appearing to be forced over the line before being cleared, but an infringement on the keeper had already been awarded.

As the conflict entered its final stages, the pace became frenetic, the tackling desperate. In 73 minutes "Gochan" made the right bye-line but his high cross was overhit. Mackay chased it to the opposite touch-line, then returned it, but MacDonald's header, 12 metres out by the far post, was again pawed away by the keeper to his right. The dangers inherent in the Blues' gung-ho approach became evident in the 75th minute as a long ball sent Ali "Barvas" whizzing down the left but his squared cross, 16 metres from goal, was headed straight to Craigie by Mackay. A minute later the forward ball was repeated but this time Macleod carried the ball to the edge of the box and as Craigie advanced, he lifted the ball over the keeper but past his right-hand post.

The failure of their offensive to establish a break-through had caused Carloway to sag slightly and the Siarachs again looked dangerous. In 81 minutes a Colin George free-kick, 20 metres out on the Carloway left, had to be fisted away by Craigie, before the *coup de grâce* arrived on the stroke of time, when a low free-kick from the left broke out to Sullivan whose drive was blocked leftwards to "Barvas", 12 metres out by Craigie's right-hand post, and he instantly stroked the ball home, just inside

the post, through Williamson's legs (0-2).

Full-time: Westside 2 Carloway 0

St. John remarked that, "*The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou — canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth —*". Clearly he had a crystal ball that could see two millennia into the future, to an outpost in Ultima Thule, where eleven young men, in pseudo-Real Madrid outfits, struggled to understand how they managed to lose this Final 0-2.

The omens for Carloway may not have been propitious but their response to rumours of their passing was exemplary. Doubts had been multiplying over where the true Carloway XI had disappeared to in the last month but the missing squad certainly re-appeared tonight on Goathill with a positive, full-on display which brushed aside any tactical or personnel difficulties. Only the unkindest of Gods denied them any reward for their efforts. However, there is no such thing as "*just desert*" in sport. The team that scores the goal(s) "*deserves*" to win; and Westside scored twice; the Blues didn't. So, congratulations to the Siarachs. Quite a season! Maybe a first-ever League title too? Who knows?

Carloway, however, may have left Goathill gutted and their fans disconsolate, but, apart from one moment of slackness on the hour, this performance was light years ahead of the last four, illuminated by excellent displays from Domhnall Mackay, Phil Macleod, and "D.I.", and especially notable for a resurgent desire for the ball, movement off it, and wish to push forward at pace. Unfortunately, no winners' medals decorated Gordon Craigie and Archie MacDonald in what was, probably, their last Final for the club. Nevertheless, the hope must be to build on this positive display and conclude the season with inspiring triumphs versus Ness, Athletic, and United.

Carloway Man of the Match: Phil Macleod.

Westside Man of the Match: Ali "Barvas" Macleod.