

Lewis and Harris League:

Carloway 0 (0) Westside 3 (1)

Innes Iain Morrison 32

Jamie Sullivan 59

Martainn Shields 85

At Cnoc a' Choilich.

Monday, 18.5.14.

Ref.: Stuart Macleod.

Line judges: D.J.Maclean (Bragar); Andrew Macleod (Carloway).

CARLOWAY:

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

Gordon Craigie

Kyle Brunton Norman "Taz" Morrison Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur

Kevin "Barra" Macneil Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Rab Maciver Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod (capt.) Ali "Laxay" Macdonald

Ross Maciver Josh Harris

Subs.used: Domhnall Mackay (Rab Maciver) 22; Chris "Christy" Smith (Josh Harris) 61;

Stuart "Gochan" Macleod (Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod) 81.

Subs. not used: David "Lurch" Murray; Joe Armstrong.

WESTSIDE:

Manager: Murchadh Macdonald.

Innes Iain Morrison Jamie Sullivan

Martainn Shields Dan Macphail Ally Williamson (capt.) Ali "Barvas" Macleod

Johnnie Wallace Donnie "Noe" Smith Campbell Macdonald Gordon Campbell

Peter Macaskill

Subs. used: Louis Macdonald (Jamie Sullivan) 67; Luke Mackay (Innes Iain Morrison) 84;

Shaun "Lefty" Macdonald (Martainn Shields) 88.

Ever since Peter "Dokus" Macdonald led Carloway out of the shadows to become serious challengers, Westside have dogged their footsteps and indeed, in the last year, have overtaken them as the side most feared in the West. As a result, up until last year's corresponding fixture in April, Carloway - and no doubt Westside - fans awaited their confrontations with a subtle mix of expectation and apprehension as the two emerging rivals sought the ascendancy over each other and the other sides on the island.

Last season the Blues as reigning Champions had faced off against their most serious challengers for the first time since that memorable triumph in August 2013 at Barvas, when they had clinched their first Championship 3-1, knowing that West were intent on repeating the Blues' feat with their own first Championship.

Astonishingly, only two of the Blues' squad who started that 1-1 draw last year started tonight - Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur and Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod - though Gordon Craigie, Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald, and Kevin "Barra" Macneill had graced the bench. Tonight's line-up, of course, was a reflection of na Gormaich's continuing problems with departures and injury. Domhnall Mackay and Chris "Christy" Smith had been delayed on the mainland and

could only arrive later to join the bench, while Billy Anderson, Andrew "Tago" Maciver, and Calum Tom Moody were unavailable. Jack Buchanan (swollen ankle) and Lee Johnson (hamstring) still joined the much-missed Donald "D.I." MacIennan in the treatment room. Hence, a makeshift back-line had to be conjured up, Kyle Brunton dropping back into an unfamiliar right-back role, with Norman "Taz" Morrison stepping to his right to centre-back, covered by Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur. Youngsters, Ross Maciver and Josh Harris, led, with "Dokus" dropping into the right side of a more recognizable midfield of "Barra", "Dokus", Rab Maciver, "Sqweg", and Ali "Laxay" Macdonald.

The Siarachs were not seriously affected by absence: Scott Graham was still globe-trotting, but former favourite, Johnny Wallace, had returned from Ness to slot in seamlessly at left-back as replacement for Duncan Maclean, while Jamie Sullivan continued up front beside Innes Iain Morrison, giving the line-up a settled appearance of stability in defence and central midfield, augmented by talent and pace on the flanks and in attack.

It was an astonishingly pleasant, windless evening, considering the monsoon-like afternoon experienced on the islands, George "Spy's" masterpiece trim and firm. Immediately Carloway tried to force the pace, "Barra" breaking clear on the right, but his whipped low cross from the touch-line, 14 metres from the bye-line, was a couple of metres too far for Harris in the centre. In 8 minutes, an inviting "Dokus" free-kick, curled in from 24 metres on the right, travelled a metre over the assembled heads in the penalty area. A minute later the same player had a right-footer charged down in the area for a corner to Macaskill's left, and the resultant "Sqweg" corner broke in awkwardly by the near post and had to be scrambled away by Wallace.

In 11 minutes Ali "Barvas" finally came to life, turning in round "Laxay", then sharp body-turned right past "Tiger" but his low slip to Williamson, 30 metres out in the centre, led to a "Sqweg" trip. Macdonald's chipped free-kick then forced Craigie to rush out to punch clear on his 6-metre area. A minute later "Dokus" was once more set up by "Sqweg" to move in to the right corner of the West box, then ride a Williamson tackle, but his right-footer curled a metre over the bar.

The Barvas men responded with Campbell receiving the ball back from "Barvas" to supply Macphail steaming diagonally across into the Carloway left, but his high cross, 16 metres from the line, was a shade too high for the arriving "Barvas's" head and went straight up.

The departure of the influential Rab Maciver in 22 minutes seemed to presage a sea-change in central midfield, despite the arrival of Mackay. Maciver and Williamson had negated each other, with Macphail largely supportive, rather than creative, but Mackay naturally gravitated backwards to protect "Taz", as increasing signs of aggression from Morrison and "Barvas" began to test Brunton and "Tiger" with movement and pace. Carloway's main threat still centred on "Dokus", supplied by "Sqweg" and "Barra", with Ross Maciver and Harris lone wolves up front, easy meat for Wallace, "Noe" and Campbell.

In 25 minutes a Williamson diagonal allowed “Barvas” to break right, cut in, then reverse-diagonal to Campbell coming forward to 20 metres from the bye-line. “Barvas” connected, but his header flew up and left, where Williamson managed to reverse-head inwards from the far bye-line, leading to an unholy melée in front of Craigie, before “Taz” launched the ball into orbit.

Mackay then released the breaking “Barra” down the right, but his swinging cross, 18 metres from the line, flew across behind the charging Harris. However, in 32 minutes the wheels finally came off the Carloway wagon: a cleared ball led to a tussle among Shields, “Barra”, and Wallace on the left centre-line. The left-back then sent a delicately flighted forward pass for Morrison to ghost wide on the left off Brunton and into the box, draw Craigie, then chip a cool left-footer over the keeper and into the top, opposite corner of the net (0-1).

Two minutes later “Dokus” won the ball on the right centre-line, then released Maciver through the centre. Under pressure from Macdonald, he made the edge of the box, but pulled his low left-footer a metre wide of Macaskill’s left-hand post. In 37 minutes Morrison was supplied on the left edge of the Carloway area, then slipped the ball wide to the breaking Shields but Craigie managed to beat his shot away, low to his right. The corner was cleared for another, which was back-heeled in low by the near post. A first and second stab at the ball were blocked by Craigie, the second rebounding upwards where a reflex Williamson header somehow managed to travel a foot over the bar from 6 metres.

The half concluded with another vicious corner on the Carloway right forcing Craigie to claw the ball away from under his bar.

Half-time: Carloway 0 Westside 1

No doubt, na Gormaich were happy to hear the half-time whistle, after a torrid final ten minutes to the half. The Siarachs appeared to have stepped up a gear after the opener, exploiting perfectly the disintegration of a united opposing midfield and challenging a lack of organised cover in defence and pace on the flanks, especially the left.

The pass/move/pass La Liga technique, beloved by Lochs, and to a certain extent Point, was replicated exactly tonight by West, and, like Point, with Sam Macsween and Ali “Wally” Maciver, they were endowed with the additional twin bonuses of elusive, multi-talented front men in Innes Iain Morrison and “Barvas”. Whenever they contributed, the Blues simply could not get “on” them. The Usain Bolt-style of Sullivan was also a major headache. It’s debatable whether or not it would have made a major difference if Mackay had adopted a Beckenbauer role on coming on, rather than that of Makelele, as “Taz” was not the problem; it was vulnerability on the wings, and a lack of organized supply lines to the unused Maciver and Harris.

If Westside had moved up a gear midway through the first half, they moved

up yet another in the second, as Carloway increasingly fragmented into a loose defensive mode. A delightful piece of keepie-uppie on the edge of the Siarach box did allow "Dokus" a sight of Macaskill in 49 minutes, but the finish went straight to the keeper. In 54 minutes, however, Craigie was tested much more severely when a sweeping Barvas move was initiated by "Noe" finding Shields free on the left touch-line, just inside the Blues' half. The winger, in turn, dispatched an exquisite diagonal inwards and across to the right where "Barvas" made 20 metres from the bye-line to send an inch-perfect cross straight to the head of the arriving Morrison, 10 metres out in the centre. Nevertheless, "Van Der Sar" managed superbly to finger-tip the ball away to his right.

In quick succession, two "Barvas" runs saw him, first, leave "Laxay" for dead, then fox "Tiger" by turning inwards along the line of the box, but his left-footer went straight to Craigie; then a blistering run the length of the right of the field, left defenders chasing him like a comet's tail, but his final strike from 18 metres was a metre too high over Carloway's left-side bar. A minute later the contest was effectively over when a "Barvas" pass from just inside the Carloway half, on the right, appeared to have been covered by "Taz", but his attempted boot clear rebounded off Sullivan behind the defender, allowing the fast-reacting youngster to race into the box, stay calm, then stroke a low right-footer from 16 metres to the right of the helpless keeper and into the far corner of the net (**0-2**).

Na Gormaich's priorities now became clear, with Smith immediately replacing Harris. Westside, in their turn, switched the engine to "idle", content to stay safe, aware that they had Morrison, Sullivan, and "Barvas" to inject pace and movement at will and create. Calloway huffed and puffed but lack of a functioning, united midfield caused little concern to the opposition.

In 64 minutes the ever-tenacious Maciver did manage to win the ball midway within the Siarach half and supply "Barra" breaking right, but his strong, low cross, 16 metres from the bye-line, came too early for the arriving front-men.

Five minutes later a through ball sent Morrison scampering into the left of the Blues' box, but as he turned inwards, "Tiger" just managed to whip the ball away from him, for the arriving "Barvas" to chip in a neat right-footer which spun past Craigie's right-hand post from 20 metres.

The pace of the game rapidly declined to that of a bounce game, before Westside finally confirmed its outcome in the 85th minute through a neat piece of personal skill from Shields. Receiving a "Noe" pass midway within the Blues' half, he turned swiftly inwards off "Gochan", showed the ball to "Tiger", then roared past him to his right. As Craigie rushed out, he swung a low left-footer across him and via his fingertips into the far corner of the goal (**0-3**).

Na Gormaich's final attack, with "Laxay", "Sqweg", and "Dokus" breaking 3-on-2 was their first shot on target of the half, with "Dokus" checking, then from 18 metres sending in a high right-foot shot that Macaskill held high.

Full-time: Carloway 0 (0) Westside 3 (1)

This really was a "*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold*" evening for the Blues. Granted, circumstances militated against a first-choice settled squad taking the field, so that for the first time this season, the defence, so often a bulwark under Domhnall Mackay's tutelage, also became part of the problem. Unfortunately, after a promising opening 20 minutes, the midfield replicated the 2015 campaign's familiar lack of cohesive purpose, perhaps due to the lack of strong central leadership and clearly defined roles which have plagued the Blues this season so far, so that the quality of the Carloway front men - Ross Maciver, Josh Harris, Jack Buchanan - goes untapped.

Tonight, with pressure from a strong opposing mid-line in Martainn Shields, Dan Macphail, Ali Williamson, and "Barvas", united with the electric pace and unpredictable movement of Innes Iain Morrison and "Barvas", na Gormaich's centre park problems gradually encompassed the back-line also, and initial enthusiasm soon evaporated, helped along the way by the disappearance of the creative Rab Maciver, which led to further disruption.

More worrying was the departure of any spirit from the side around the hour, as if in acceptance that their plight was irredeemable, something that would simply not have been countenanced by the likes of an Iain Angus "Gus" Maciver. An inspirational figure like Domhnall Mackay cannot cover all the bases, even supported by the artistry of "Dokus" and grit of "Sqweg". Fitness and availability will solve some of na Gormaich's present problems but strong voices in the dressing-room or on the field are sometimes as important as talent, movement, and pace.

Carloway Man of the Match: Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald.
Westside Man of the match: Ali "Barvas" Macleod.