

Lewis and Harris League:

Carloway 2 (1) Westside 1 (1)

*Domhnall Mackay (pen.) 28 Luke Mackay 37
Archie "Statto" MacDonald 50*

At Cnoc a' Choilich, Carloway, 19:00.

Monday, 27.6.16.

Ref.: Willie "Mashie" Macleod.

Carloway line judge: Alasdair "Tiger" Macarthur.

Westside line judge: Warren Mackay/ Connor Mackay/ Martainn Shields.

CARLOWAY: 4-4-1-1.

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

Asst. Managers: Kenny "Noley" MacLennan; "Gus" Maciver.

Ross "Tiny" Maclean

*Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Donald "D.I." MacLennan Ali
"Laxay" Macdonald*

Kevin "Barra" Macneil Eachainn Miller Patrick Vigurs Archie "Statto" MacDonald

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald

Jake Allan

Sub. used: Dan Crossley (Patrick Vigurs) 60.

Subs. not used: Gordon Craigie; Joe Armstrong; Murdo "Squegg" Macleod; Euan Gilmour.

Yellow card: Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur 53.

WESTSIDE: 4-4-2.

Manager: Murchadh Macdonald.

Asst. Manager: Alex Matheson.

Luke Mackay Innes Iain Morrison

Martainn Shields Dan Macphail Scott Graham Ali "Barvas" Macleod

Duncan Maclean (capt.) Johnnie Wallace Donnie "Noe" Smith Gordon Campbell

Iain Gillies

*Subs. used: Shaun Macdonald (Donnie "Noe" Smith) 43; Connor Mackay (Martainn Shields)
67; Warren Mackay (Innes Iain Morrison) 79.*

Subs. not used: Warren Mackay; Ruairidh Graham.

Yellow cards: Innes Iain Morrison 74; Duncan Maclean 86.

Na Gormaich's mid-season renaissance as "*The Team to Watch*" faced its sternest test so far as they confronted League leaders, Westside, in the third West Lewis derby of 2016. Honours were even at present: in late April an exquisite Martainn Shields lob had granted the Siarachs a late 2-1 victory in the corresponding League fixture at Barvas, but on the Friday of the same week the Blues had gained the sweetest of revenges, and a second ABC triumph, in a pulsating final at Goathill which had everything - almost: three sendings-off; seven goals, including a cracking 30-metre special from Innes Iain Morrison; a memorable defensive clanger; a player, Johnnie Wallace, scoring for both sides; and a stunning goalkeeping performance from a senior citizen, Gordon "Van Der Sar" Craigie.

Although a 4-3 Round 1 victory over Back in the Jock Stein followed this euphoric triumph, Carloway's form nose-dived thereafter faster than a Stuka Ju 87, with five straight defeats, resulting in elimination on penalties from the Jock Stein at Garrabost, 0-1 at Col Uarach in the HAC, and three dismal

League reverses, which effectively ruled them out of any serious League challenge.

Needs must when the devil drives. With continuing knee problems affecting the continuous availability of main *animateur*, Dan Crossley, and fitness also an issue for other midfield greats, Billy Anderson and Murdo "Sgweg" Macleod, Graeme "Windy" Miller decided it had to be "*Adios muchachos*" and took the boldest of decisions, turning to the Arsène Wenger "*Book of Management Skills*", especially the chapter headed "*How to Rebuild*", sub-section, "*Give Youth a Chance*". Emerging stars, Ross "Tiny" Maclean and Joe Armstrong, now became first choices as goalkeeper and left-back, while more prominence was given to Callum "Beag" Mackay on the right, Euan Gilmour, and Jake Macleod (Garynahine).

With the arrival of Patrick Vigurs *en scène*, the re-appearance of Stuart "Gochan" Macleod, and the continued availability of Donald "Rab" Maciver, line-up options gradually became more flexible and a Ranieri approach was possible, in particular in central midfield and the strike roles. The result: a satnav was no longer required to locate the opposition net and seven straight victories were recorded, 26 goals scored and only four conceded. Motivation was now rampant, as they faced a Westside team who were experiencing a slight dip in form themselves and had not won since June 3rd, 3-2 at Goathill, versus United. On form, then, a possibility existed for Carloway success.

Statistics can prove anything; what actually happens on the field of play is another matter altogether. There was no sign of a Siarach crisis on a clear, breezy evening at Cnoc a' Choilich as West immediately seized, and held, a clear edge for most of the first half. An instant surprise was West ditching their usual 4-5-1 for 4-4-2, Innes Iain Morrison moving forward to partner Luke Mackay up front but the Carloway back 4/5 - "Tiger"/Mackay/"D.I."/"Laxay"/Armstrong - is arguably the most dependable aspect of the Blues' side and soon adjusted to cope with this unexpected difficulty. It was what was happening in the *trequartista* area in front of them that was the problem.

The first chance came as early as the 2nd minute when Shields burst free on the left, checked, then sent a pitch-wide cross which was eventually gathered by the eternally troublesome "Barvas" breaking right. He foxed "Laxay" by turning inside, 20 metres from goal to the right of the area, to give himself space to send in a superb left-foot curler which "Tiny" clawed away brilliantly *à la* Shilton as it headed for his top right corner. In 12 minutes a Siarach corner from their left broke out to Mackay, 20 metres from goal, but his crisp strike cleared the bar by a foot. Three minutes later another Ali "Barvas" break on the right led to a deep squared cross, 20 metres from the bye-line, which carried to the far bye-line for Graham(?) to reverse-head inwards. "Tiny" managed to block it outwards by his near post, which in turn led to a *melée* in the Blues' box, before being booted clear. In 17 minutes a low Morrison shot from 22 metres, to the right of the Carloway box, forced "Tiny" to dive full-length to his right to push away to his right.

As West ratcheted up the aggression, the Blues' midfield struggled to protect their defence. Next, Macphail freed Mackay to whiz diagonally rightwards towards the byeline, before squaring a bullet-cross, 12 metres from the byeline, which the arriving Graham could not quite meet fully with his head and the ball shot wide of Maclean's right-hand post.

It was the 24th minute before na Gormaich mounted a credible threat to Iain Gillies. A "Dokus" free-kick, midway within the Siarach half, on their left, was floated in beautifully for "D.I." to win the jump and head the ball on from 16 metres, but Gillies reacted athletically to tip it over his central bar. Four minutes later, an identical situation seemed to have been cleared more effectively by the West defence, only for the referee to point to the spot. Apparently, Dan Macphail had been holding "D.I." as he prepared to leap. In a season of "iffy" penalties, where would this award rate? Captain Courageous did not ask that question and wrong-footed Gillies to place a perfect conversion just inside the keeper's left-hand post (**1-0**).

What can you say? It was a perfect illustration of the old clichè: *"If you don't take your chances*". It took until the 36th minute for a stunned Barvas team to again challenge "Tiny" with that constant thorn in Carloway's flesh, "Barvas", eluding his marker to make 10 metres from the bye-line before whipping across a vicious, low, squared ball. Mackay, racing back to cover, stuck out his left foot in front of goal to clear, miscued, and breathed an almighty sign of relief to see the ball spin away harmlessly a metre outside Carloway's right-hand post.

Moments later, West drew level when the ever-dangerous, pacy Shields got behind "Tiger" to deliver yet another high-swinging diagonal, 25 metres from the bye-line, on West's left. Ali "Barvas" used his inner contortionist to meet it on the right bye-line, 18 metres from goal, and reverse-head it square. It broke out and Mackay, to the left of the Carloway goal, took a moment before sending the deftest of knee-high right-foot drives just inside "Tiny's" left-hand post from the edge of the box (**1-1**).

Half-time: Carloway 1 Westside 1

Murchadh certainly had plenty to think about over his half-time Bovril. His side had controlled the first half, had penetrated Carloway's usually rock-solid back-line frequently, and had created several reasonably good chances, but through a mixture of stout marking/tackling, carelessness, and bad luck, had only managed to register once. "Windy's" two immediate problems were devising a strategy to gain greater control in midfield and contain the aggressive pace of Shields and Ali "Barvas" as they pulled na Gormaich wide and long.

Immediately "Tiny" had to look sharp to beat away to his left a nasty Shields cross/shot coming in from Carloway's left touch-line, 24 metres from goal. However, in 50 minutes, the Blues once again stunned their neighbours when a "Dokus" corner from na Gormaich's right came in low and sharp. Mackay moved to meet the ball, 14 metres out by the near post, and cleverly back-

heeled it onwards across the face of goal. The squared flick ran free to "Statto" towards the left of goal and his instant right-foot drive crashed home, high to Gillies's left (2-1).

The Siarachs did not flag, but upped the tempo. First, a mighty Maclean free-kick from the centre circle just cleared "Tiny's" bar by a metre, though a second free-kick a minute later from 22 metres on the West right came back off the wall.

The time for shuffling the packs had clearly arrived on the hour. However, despite the arrival for Crossley for the tiring Vigurs, Westside still pressed, and a dazzling "Barvas" run led to him cutting in to deliver a delightful cross-box chip from 16 metres but the ball was a couple of feet too far for Shields to reach by the far post. Further tinkering saw the left-winger depart, "Barvas" move left, and Conor Mackay appear right. The move almost bore immediate fruit, as a "Barvas" surge into the centre of the Carloway half forced "Tiny" to block well, down to his right, then recover brilliantly to palm the rebound away for a corner to his right.

In 72 minutes a rapid nutmeg move down the Siarach right, involving Mackay, Morrison, and Campbell, ended with the full-back making the bye-line, then cutting in, but his attempted low diagonal was blocked by Tiny's" right foot, and his attempt with the rebound was mishit past.

As the pace slackened, the contest now clearly resembled a war of attrition between two tired adversaries, each competing to outlast their opponents. Chances now began to appear for the home side as West's appetite seemed to slacken. In 78 minutes a Crossley forward supply allowed "Dokus" to ghost left off his marker, check 20 metres from goal, outside the right of the Siarach box, then send a glorious right-foot diagonal over Maclean's and Wallace's heads for Allan to race in to meet unmarked, 12 metres out, by the far post, but he nodded his header just outside the post. Two minutes later a Tourè special from the centre line from Miller sent the striker clear into the left of the West box, but as Gillies advanced, Allan chipped the ball a metre over the bar.

The 83rd minute surely convinced the Barvas men it just wasn't their night. A Maclean free-kick from the centre, midway within the Carloway half, dropped over everyone to bounce just in front of his namesake. The surprised goalkeeper could only beat the whizzing ball outwards where it appeared to strike a retreating defender, then flash back past him to his left. However, a desperate Crossley, appearing from nowhere, somehow managed to get a swinging leg round it to boot the ball clear off the line. Two minutes later "Tiny's" work for the night was over, when he tipped over a back-header from his own captain.

Nevertheless, to reassure West that they did not have a monopoly of the ability to miss great chances, right at the death, a concerted move from MacDonald, Miller, and Crossley sent "Dokus" into the Siarach box, He managed to trick his way neatly between Macdonald and Wallace to face

Gillies one-on-one, but as the keeper approached, his right-foot flick from 10 metres to Gillies's right was clearly going past, before a retreating Maclean very nearly kned it into his own net, as he raced to cove, but fortunately for the defender, the ball looped over the bar.

Full-time: Carloway 2 (1) Westside 1 (1)

After games like this, the hoary old question often springs to mind, regarding desert. Who deserved to win tonight? The answer, as always, is the team which scores more goals. Possession, territory, etc. are as nothing if you cannot score. Spain have found that out in the last few years. Beautiful patterns amount to zilch if there is nothing on the scorecard.

Carloway had been under the cosh in the first hour, yet still found themselves 2-1 ahead, a not uncommon circumstance in team sports. After the hour mark, they gradually managed to combat Westside in a prolonged period of unarmed combat in the centre of the park, though chances still favoured the Siarachs, until the final quarter-hour. The back-line clung to their task tenaciously, though pace was a problem wide, which was no doubt the reason "Laxay" was deployed left, to combat "Barvas", perhaps a task too early for Joe Armstrong, though you could argue even Eddie McCreadie or Karl-Heinz Schnellinger couldn't handle Ali "Barvas" when he is in the mood.

Fortunately, the Siarach experiment of two up front, to combat a recent goal drought, didn't quite come off. The Blues' problems were mainly in midfield, where Miller needed support as *animateur*. The creative support of Crossley was not there, of course, for 60 minutes and was muted even when he came on (was he fit?), though, as ever, he exhausted himself covering every inch of the pitch.

The experience and imagination of a fully-fit Billy Anderson to inspire and guide, to direct and lead in the centre, would have been a major asset. This absence of coordinated direction had, of course, a knock-on effect up front, with a subdued "Dokus" and out-of-position Allan fighting hard to affect the outcome of events. The power of Allan was lost to support "Barra" on the right flank, where he has seemed most effective, and the main threat appeared to come though the left, where "Laxay" occasionally escaped "Barvas" marking, and later in the match minding Conor Mackay, to surge behind "Uibhisteach" and help the ebullient "Statto" to drive forward into the opposition area. Creating, and taking, chances in the opposition's area still seems a major concern for na Gormaich - and for Westside too.

Carloway Man of the Match: Donald "D.I." MacIennan.

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