

Lewis and Harris League:

## Westside 6 (5) Carloway 0 (0)

Ally Williamson 19

Martainn Shields 29 (pen.); 41

Scott Graham 36

Luke Mackay 44, 74

At Barvas, 18.30.

Friday, 28.4.17.

Ref.: Andrew Macaulay.

Carloway line judge: Alasdair "Tiger" Macarthur.

Westside line judge: Iain Gillies.

CARLOWAY: 4-4-2.

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

Asst. Manager: Domhnall Mackay; "Gus" Maciver.

David Beaton

Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Ali "Laxay" Macdonald Donald "D.I." MacIennan Joe Armstrong

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Domhnall Mackay (capt.)■ Andrew "Tago" Maciver■

Archie "Statto" MacDonald

Callum "Beag" Mackay Kevin "Gochan" Macleod■

Subs. used: Ben Smith (Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur) 45■ ; Jordan Macleod (Callum "Beag" Mackay) 45; Billy Anderson (Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald) 74; Gordon "Tago" Macdonald (Archie "Statto" MacDonald) 85.

Sub. not used: Stuart "Gochan" Macleod.

Yellow cards: Andrew "Tago" Maciver 46; Domhnall Mackay 52; Kevin "Gochan" Macleod 53; Billy Anderson 82.

Red card: Ben Smith (foul and abusive language) 76.

WESTSIDE: 4-5-1.

Manager: "Murchadh" Macdonald.

Asst. Manager: Alex Matheson.

Lewis "Preston" Robinson■

Martainn Shields Scott Graham Ally Williamson■ Innes Iain Morrison Ali "Barvas" Macleod

Duncan Maclean (capt.)■ Euan Shirkie Donnie "Noe" Smith Gordon Campbell David "Lurch" Murray

Subs. used: Luke Mackay (Ali "Barvas" Macleod) 17; Johnnie Wallace (Ally Williamson) 79.

Subs. not used: Ewan Macleod; Iain Gillies.

Yellow cards: Duncan Maclean 62; Ally Williamson 66.

Red card: Lewis "Preston" Robinson (serious foul play) 59.

The memory of the mauling in the opening forty-five minutes of April's ABC Semi-Final must have been scorched indelibly on the collective subconscious of the Blues' squad as they trooped out tonight on to their own personal "*Field of Nightmares*". Barvas is not, of course, near the top of any Blues' bucket list. After all, apart from their stunning 3-1 triumph here on the evening of 16th August, 2013, which sealed their sole Championship title, Barvas has more often been the venue for nights of abject misery and *what-might-have-beens*. A dismal 1-2 League reverse here last year was preceded by a 2-4 reverse in 2015, 0-4 the year before, and so on. The record here is not a continuing tale of joy and fulfilment. Still, the second half performance in the ABC was marginally more acceptable than that of

the first, giving a limited hope of a fair result, but the counter-argument to that would be that a side who are three-up and have another daunting contest lined up on the Friday against Athletic are hardly likely to burst their blood vessels attempting to further subdue a punchless opponent.

However, Carloway's back-line did look more solid from the kick-off tonight with Ali "Laxay" Macdonald as the fulcrum, supported by the returning suspendee, Donald "D.I." MacLennan, between Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur and Joe Armstrong. Thus Domhnall Mackay and Andrew "Tago" Maciver were enabled to provide steel in central midfield, between Archie "Statto" MacDonald, wide on the left, and Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald dropping back and right, in place of the unfortunate Jordan Macleod who, despite a committed performance last time out, only graced the bench, alongside veterans, Billy Anderson and Gordon "Tago" Macdonald, and two other young stars, Stuart "Gochan" Macleod and the always welcome, Ben Smith.

Fraser "Frazmac" Macleod, underused in the last game, was unavailable, though David Beaton was, but the real surprise in blue was supposedly-retired live-wire and all-round ball-of-fire, Kevin "Gochan" Macleod, up front beside developing star hit-man, Callum "Beag" Mackay. Westside had slightly shuffled the pack, with one pain-in-the-neck, Luke Mackay, making way for Lewis "Preston" Robinson to move up front, allowing another constant irritant, Ali "Barvas" Macleod, to start on right midfield. At the back, the reappearance of Donnie "Noe" Smith in central defence beside another developing young star, Euan Shirkie, allowed Duncan Maclean to cover his more usual position at left-back in place of Shaun "Lefty" Macdonald.

The opening bone-shuddering exchanges failed to foreshadow the catastrophé that would rapidly engulf na Gormaich, with wind-assisted pressure gaining Carloway several early free-kicks for minor infringements. However, soon the pace and trickery of Morrison and Robinson, backed by the strength of Graham and Williamson, dominated the midfield clashes, with "Barvas" and Shields pulling the Carloway back-line wide, then testing them repeatedly for pace. In 4 minutes a Maclean free-kick on the West right, 2 metres from the bye-line, zipped across the Carloway goal with no takers.

In 10 minutes another Maclean free-kick, this time 10 metres into the Carloway half on the right-hand side, saw an attempted header fail, then a Robinson shot blocked in the centre on the edge of the box. The ball then spun away to the edge of the box, on Beaton's right, where a Shields attempt spun high off "Tiger" to the opposite far post for Williamson to hit the ball off the diving keeper. The ball came straight out, was whammed in again by "Preston", but blocked on the line by "D.I.", then cleared away to the right. Whew! Four minutes later "Barvas" whizzed behind Armstrong on the right, then delivered a high deep cross which was reverse-headed square by Morrison beyond the far post. "Preston" did get a head to it but couldn't control it, the ball continuing back to "Barvas" who in turn was unable to control it and injured himself, stopping "Statto" robbing him and departing. Nevertheless, the departure of "Barvas" brought no relief to the pressured Blues, with Mackay adding his prodigious talent to an uncontainable mid- and front-line.

In 19 minutes the inevitable arrived, Morrison winning the ball in the centre circle, before sending a sublime diagonal *á la* Jimmy McIlroy behind "Tiger" for Shields to leave him for dead and steam to the bye-line. His perfect low cross reached the unmarked Williamson, plumb in the centre, 10 metres out, and he fired the ball home to Beaton's left without any fuss (0-1).

Amazingly, Carloway, who had not yet threatened "Lurch" in the opposition goal,

had an unexpected chance to equalize immediately, when "Pongo" picked up a slack clearance and forced himself down the right to send across an inviting cross, 16 metres from the line. The squared ball was somehow missed by everyone in the centre and came to a solitary MacDonald inside the left of the Siarach box. He had time to switch off his iPhone and take aim but his right-foot strike was three inches out and thwacked off the top half of "Lurch's" left-hand post, and spun away.

It proved to be costly as immediately Robinson fed Mackay down the right, and he in turn sent Williamson free. He checked and played back to the following Robinson who tricked his way into the right of the Carloway box, only for "Statto" to arrive on his left and come round from behind to tackle and bring him down. No hesitation from the referee and Shields confidently sent Beaton right as he fired the penalty home crisply to his left **(0-2)**.

Once again, Carloway had a surprise opportunity to save a game which was in danger of spinning away from them, when an enormous "D.I." free-kick on the Carloway left and just inside West's half caused confusion in the Siarach box. The ball spun loose and Mackay had two stabs at it, 10 metres out by "Lurch's" left-hand post, but force of numbers crowded him out and the ball was booted clear. Again na Gormaich suffered an immediate blow. Neat play on the Siarach right allowed Campbell to find Robinson and he turned inwards to send Williamson into the right of the Carloway box but Beaton pulled off a brilliant stop, low to his left. The resultant short corner from Maclean came high and deep to find Graham, 10 metres out beyond the far post and his high looping reverse-header completely hoodwinked the keeper to drop under the left side of his bar **(0-3)**.

Two minutes later na Gormaich had another opportunity to rescue something from the night, when a foul on Mackay delivered a free-kick, dead centre and 20 metres from goal, but "Dokus's" perfectly-flighted right-footer smacked the top of "Lurch's" right-side bar and flew onwards. In 41 minutes Carloway were again punished for their misses when a perfect Campbell cross from the touch-line, 18 metres from the West right bye-line, was met by Shields in the centre in front of "Tiger", and though Beaton got his hands to it, its power pushed it high into the net, off the underside of his left-hand bar **(0-4)**.

The last few minutes of the half witnessed the collapse of the Carloway midfield and defence and provided the Siarachs with two more opportunities to capitalize. Once again from the centre circle, a Graham defence-splitter allowed "Preston" to glide into the box between "D.I." and Armstrong but Beaton was out like lightning to block his low drive from 16 metres. However, moments later he could do nothing as Shields fed Mackay who sped towards the edge of the box in the centre, cut right off "Laxay" and from 20 metres whipped round to his left to send a sharp right-footer crashing home to the left of the wrong-footed keeper **(0-5)**.

### **Half-time: Westside 5 Carloway 0**

The score-line did not flatter the home side. In fact, although the visitors had had some bad luck, the Carloway boys would probably have been happier to undergo a round or two with Anthony Joshua than replay 45 minutes like these. After the penalty award, na Gormaich had simply lost all shape and purpose, and each Siarach surge forward - planned, pacy, and incisive - threatened success. The half-time whistle brought temporary relief, but what could "Windy's" options be for the next 45 minutes? Direct action was necessary. Immediately, the pacy Smith replaced "Tiger", who had had a torrid time trying to contain Shields, while "Beag",

who had covered most of the pitch, relentlessly trying to get a decent ball, made way for “Dokus” to move in and forward, and allow Jordan Macleod to test Maclean on the right.

It kind of worked, maybe. Just as had happened in the ABC Semi-Final, Carloway did manage to establish a presence in midfield and get some decent openers forward, mainly to the right, but, of course, one might also suppose that Westside subconsciously relaxed in view of the enormous lead they had built up. Nevertheless, in 54 minutes a short corner on Beaton’s right was knocked back out, only for “Preston” to gather it on the edge of the box, 18 metres from goal, and chip the ball over Beaton. However, he then had the bad fortune to see it run along the face of the bar, then be cleared.

Three minutes later another lightning Siarach break down the right saw Morrison send “Preston” into the right of the Blues’ box but his instant left-foot strike was pulled low outside Beaton’s left-hand post. Moments later, the young-blood was asked to take an early shower after an altercation with “Gochan” but still the Blues could not capitalize on their numerical advantage in a match which was now continually broken by minor fouls, yellow cards, and player injuries.

On the hour a Carloway free-kick, just outside the West box on their left, 22 metres from goal was rebuffed and a “Dokus” strike in reply flew a metre wide from 20 metres in the centre. In 74 minutes na Gormaich’s misery was complete when a Siarach break on the left led to a Shields throw-in, midway within the Carloway half, feeding Mackay and he slipped inwards away from Smith and “D.I.”, past “Laxay”, and then from 16 metres stabbed the ball low under Beaton by the near post (**0-6**).

A minute later another storming West break through the centre ended with Shields slipping the ball to his left to Mackay but his moment of glory to secure a hat-trick went awry when he skied the ball into the Atlantic from the centre edge of the box.

Any hope of a respectable finish with a goal or two departed a minute later with Smith being advised by the referee that his opinions were deeply unwelcome and he should join “Preston”. Finally, Martainn Shields might have also grabbed a deserved hat-trick in added-on time when his beautifully-flighted right-foot free-kick from the edge of the box on Beaton’s right, 16 metres from the bye-line, bounced off the top of the bar and carried on over.

**Full-time: Westside 6 (5) Carloway 0 (0)**

This really was “*Behold a white horse*” territory for the boys in blue tonight. No wonder most of them looked to the heavens at the final whistle, no doubt searching for that angry god that was frowning on them. “Windy” does not have his problems to seek, the first seeming to be finding a recognised hit-man up front, although if you read “*The Kenny Dalglish Approach to Football Management*”, to build a team, you start at the back and move forward.

It’s easy to be judgmental after a night like this, commenting on your side’s weaknesses, but it has to be remembered that the opposition was a class outfit who are, most likely, destined to move on to a silver-bedecked season, combining as they do that desired mix of experience, youth, creativity, and tactical nous which always promises - and invariably delivers - success. When you are the opposition at this level and meet a trio like Morrison, Mackay, and “Preston”, with “Barvas” and Shields wide, it’s unlikely you will be able to cope - not for 90 minutes anyway. Problems are often easy to recognize, much more difficult to solve, even to mitigate.

Pace and ingenuity on the wings overcame the backs, with support lacking from the centre, simply because "Laxay" and "D.I." were too busy trying to second-guess Morrison and Mackay. The powerful surges of a wing-back like Campbell meant "Uibhisteach" was kept wide and central, unable to support Armstrong, while Mackay and "Pongo", unsettled by those behind them or among them, were unable to negate Graham and Williamson.

Again, zonal marking seemed to be preferred, although, facing an outfit like Westside, man-to-man marking would mean your whole team effort might be spent trying to mark those members of the opposition classed as "*dangerous*". Also, when Westside moved, they moved fast, found the open spaces, distributed well, and incisively, as tactical awareness seemed to tell them telepathically where each player should be when a move began.

Na Gormaich, in contrast, were pedestrian in their build-up, allowing the Siarrachs to re-group, anticipate, then, crush the move, a reason why the potentially dangerous "Frazmac" failed to ignite in the ABC and "Beag" has to keep going looking for the ball - any service is cut off before it reaches them. Tonight, one bright spark was the return of a class performer in "Gochan" who did not seem to have forgotten or lost one iota of his former close ball-control, positional sense, or ability to lay off and find the open spaces. The Blues need half a dozen of him.

**Carloway Man of the Match: Kevin "Gochan" Macleod.**

**Westside Man of the Match: Ally Williamson.**