

Eilean an Fhraoich Cup Round 1 Leg 1:

Westside 0 (0) Carloway 2 (0)

Eachainn Miller 54

Andy "Bernera" Morrison 79

At Barvas Showground, Barvas.

Friday, 25th May, 2018, 19.00.

Referee: Neil Macritchie (Carloway).

Westside line judge: Paul Forster

Carloway line judge: Alasdair "Tiger" Macarthur.

CARLOWAY: 4-5-1.

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

Asst. Managers: Domhnall Mackay; Iain Angus "Gus" Maciver.

Jack Maclennan (United)

*Coinneach Smith (United) Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur ■ Donald "D.I." Maclennan Joe Armstrong
Callum "Beag" Mackay Eachainn Miller ■ Domhnall Mackay (capt.) ■ John "Uig" Morrison (Lochs)
Gordon "Tago" Macdonald (Lochs)*

Hamish Macdonald (United)

*Subs. used: Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald (Gordon "Tago" Macdonald) 70; Andy "Bernera" Morrison
(Hamish Macdonald) 78; Euan Gilmour (Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald) 90.*

Subs. not used: Andrew "Lanky" Macdonald; Calum "Killer" Mackay.

Yellow cards: Eachainn Miller (foul play) 74; Domhnall Mackay (dissent) 74.

Red card: Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur (foul play) 83.

WESTSIDE: 4-4-2.

Manager: "Murchadh" Macdonald.

Asst. Manager: Stuart "Tyson" Campbell.

Luke Mackay Innes Iain Morrison

Alex John Morrison Scott Graham (capt.) Dan Macphail Martainn Shields

Euan Shirkie Ali Williamson ■ Ross Macrae (Athletic) Gordon Campbell

Derek Smith

*Subs. used: Sam Mackay (Alex John Morrison) 62; Duncan Shirkie (Dan Macphail) 69; David Allan
Macmillan (Luke Mackay) 89*

Subs. not used:

Yellow cards: Ali Williamson (foul play) 61?.

Tonight, the Blues headed north-east to Barvas, a ground with considerable emotional baggage in the collective memory of the Blues and their fanbase. Scenes of utter delight - and misery - have been enacted here. Does anyone in the Carlway area remember that League night in August, 2007, when their heroes were ground like powder 1-9 by the Siarachs? Hopefully, Gordon Craigie or Domhnall Mackay don't - they were there! Or the 1-7 thrashing in the EaF in June 2009? No, "*better by far you should forget and smile than that you should remember and be sad*" should, perhaps, be the appropriate response. Or think instead of that evening of unrivalled bliss in August 2013 when a "Frazmac" thunderball sealed na Gormaich's first Championship success, high to "Van Der Sar's" right (yes, him!).

Even last year, events at Barvas seemed to intimate that a full season of misery awaited the Blues. A 0-6 thrashing in their opening League game, sandwiched between two Cup defeats at home to the same team, hardly augured well for the

forthcoming campaign. Yet na Gormaich picked themselves up from this nightmare opening and did not lose another competitive fixture on the island till the end of July. That was 1-2 to Athletic in the Moldova Lewis, having beaten their West coast rivals three days earlier, 4-2, in a crucial League six-pointer at Cnoc a' Choilich.

In football, all is possible. Not that too much of this history applied to tonight's proceedings, given the special nature of the EaF. David Beaton, Archie MacDonald, Neil Sinclair, and Callum Masson could not feature, of course, but their replacements were more than equal to the battle ahead. The two United men - Jack MacLennan and their captain, Hamish Macdonald, and two Lochies, John "Uig" Morrison and Gordon "Togo" Macdonald, had all tasted victory before, once or twice, on behalf of the Blues, while a third Wasp, Coinneach Smith, débuted at right-back. Another former guest from Athletic, Stuart "Bubble" Macdonald, is now a fully signed-up member of the Blues' squad, of course. Further good news for na Gormaich was the return of Eachainn Miller for the summer from Stirling, bringing that touch of imagination and creativity to midfield, that Carloway miss so much with the absence of Dan Crossley this season and only an occasional appearance from Billy Anderson.

The weight of history might have affected tonight's sides, it being as long ago as 2007 since an EaF Final has not featured one or other, or both, of tonight's sides. Carloway were also in the unusual position of defending a trophy, the Cup having sat in their boardroom since late evening on 12th August 2016, but whether these considerations or the unfamiliar line-ups were to blame, it was a low-key, inconclusive opening. In 2 minutes a Shields free-kick on the left corner of the Carloway box, thudded against the wall and was cleared, but it took till the 23rd minute for Carloway to force their first corner. A minute later Westside broke on their right, a Morrison breaker diagonally forward enabling Mackay to make the bye-line, 18 metres from the Blues' left-hand post. However, his low cut-back across goal, though out of reach of MacLennan by the near post, found no takers before "D.I." swept it away at the far post.

In 26 minutes Carloway finally threatened when Mackay, in the centre circle, moved forward into the Siarach half before delivering the neatest of forward lobs, diagonally to his right. This enabled Callum "Beag" to elude his marker, 22 metres from goal, 10 metres in from the touch-line. Twelve metres from the line, he sent over a squared cross, which MacDonald met 16 metres out from the near post but his neat glancing head-flick travelled a metre outside the far post. Three minutes later Carloway almost edged in front, when a Callum "Beag" throw-in, 12 metres from the bye-line, was blocked out back to him. His first-time right-foot cross dropped neatly in front of goal, leading to a melée, before the ball was knocked out to Macdonald, 16 metres from goal. His first drive was blocked, but his immediate return went through the ruck to the keeper's left. Amazingly, Campbell, stationed on the line, managed to block it away to his right, illegally, claimed the Carloway boys.

Four minutes later West replied, when Shields, 10 metres in from the touch-line, in line with the box, drove the ball hard into the box. The strike was deflected out off "Tiger" to Morrison, on the 18-metre line, towards the far post, but his first-time right-foot volley went high and wide of MacLennan's left-hand post. In 34 minutes, an Armstrong drive on the left took him from his own half to midway within the West

half, before flighting over a diagonal to Miller, 16 metres from goal by the near post, but his first-time connect was a metre over the Siarach right-hand post and bar.

Then, another let-off arrived for the home team when John "Uig" and Mackay combined in the centre to free Callum "Beag" down the right. Eighteen metres from the line, he crossed low into a crowded box. MacDonald and Miller both had a stab at the ricocheting ball, 12 metres from the goal-line, but once more it was blocked in turn by a combination of the goalie and Campbell, and cleared. In 39 minutes, the Blues had their final chance when a Mackay long ball from midway within his half allowed Macdonald to race towards the Siarach goal. Pressured by Macrae, he was forced to veer right-wards, but when he whipped round, 12 metres from goal, and shot, the ball caught the defender's left hip, flew upwards, hit the top of the bar, and went over.

Half-time: Westside 0 Carloway 0

It had been a curious first-half for the visitors. For the first half-hour, they had hardly featured as a coordinated attacking force as the Siarachs forced the pace but without creating any serious threat to Maclennan. Yet Carloway must have gone in at the interval annoyed with themselves that they had not converted any of the golden chances they had fashioned in the final quarter-hour.

Would they regret these missed opportunities? They almost did, immediately, when a long forward ball from Campbell on the right cleared the line and allowed Innes Iain to run in unhindered on Maclennan. However, the United keeper reacted immediately and charged out to meet the striker, who got to the ball first on the edge of the box but saw his attempted lob charged down, then scrambled clear. Instantly, the ball was worked across field to Callum "Beag", on the Carloway right, and he took off down the touch-line to the edge of the Westside box, before squaring in to Macdonald, coming to meet him along the line. He neatly side-stepped Macrae to his right, but his low drive from 16 metres went straight to the keeper.

Then, clear light appeared between the sides in the 54th minute, in the simplest of fashions. A John "Uig" corner on the Carloway left came in perfectly for Miller to meet, full-on, 12 metres out by the near post, and ram a bullet-like header straight home within the top corner of the Siarach net. No keeper would have got that one! **(0-1)**.

In 62 minutes, the home side almost replied when Graham, midway within the Carloway half, found Shields ghosting behind Callum "Beag" on the left, then cutting in across the Carloway box. However, his attempted low right-footer was slightly mishit and flew well-wide of Maclennan's right-hand post. Moments later, John "Uig", "Bubble", and Mackay combined through the centre to send Miller clear down the right of the Westside half. The young star made the bye-line, tricked his way inside his marker, then lifted over a neat cut-back cross to Macdonald, 16 metres out by the near post. Unfortunately, his decisive header downwards flashed a couple of feet outside the near post.

In 73 minutes, the Siarachs almost clawed themselves back into the tie when a beautifully-struck Shields free-kick from all of 24 metres to the left of the Carloway goal struck the top of Maclennan's left bar, and flew over. Five minutes later,

however, tonight's leg was settled, or appeared to be. A West misunderstanding on the edge of the Carloway box between Innes Iain and Shields allowed "D.I." to play the ball forward to Mackay moving to the centre line. The captain lobbed a straight ball forward in search of Miller, who in turn back-headed the pass straight on for "Bernera" breaking past Williamson's left and into the box. As the keeper advanced, the big striker, who had only come on a moment before, slid a perfect low ball home to the keeper's left. His first touch! **(0-2)**.

That appeared to conclude proceedings, but the tempo of the final minutes was suddenly ratcheted up to max with the dismissal of "Tiger" in the 83rd minute. This signified an opportunity to the home side to reduce the deficit, bearing in mind another 90 minutes awaited the combatants on June 11th. From the resultant free-kick, again around 24 metres from Maclennan but this time in the centre, another Shields right-footer beat the wall but this time whizzed a foot outside the Blues' right-hand post. West's pressure was constant now but it was the fourth minutes of an unprecedented **SEVEN** minutes of added-on time before Innes Iain was able to fashion another opening. Receiving the ball on the right from Graham, midway within na Gormaich's half, he moved in to the edge of the box, jinxed to Armstrong's left, then sent an inviting low diagonal, 12 metres out across the face of the Blues' goal, but just too far for any Siarach striker to reach.

Full-time: Westside 0 (0) Carloway 2 (0)

Ah, well, "*S e obair latha tòiseachadh*". Are Carloway on the way to a historic hat-trick in the EaF? There's still a long way to go, but few victories are harder to achieve than those at Barvas, and this one was well-earned, as everyone turned up on the night; everyone wanted the ball. The Blues are only halfway in this round, of course, but better to be ahead, for the return at Cnoc a' Choilich, than behind. Who knows what might happen there.

It's a strange old game football. It took Carloway nearly half an hour to mount a serious attack, yet by the final whistle they must have felt that they should have had this tie dead and buried by half-time. Every fan knows a football match can turn on a certain incident or be affected by unfortunate circumstance: if Innes Iain had managed to beat Jack Maclennan in the 46th minute, what might have unfolded? Or if John "Uig", a pivotal force tonight in the centre of the field, is unavailable for the return? Tonight's performance, nevertheless, can sit proudly in the Carloway F.C. annals and be fondly remembered as an all-round team effort which delivered a satisfactory outcome.

Carloway Man of the Match: John "Uig" Morrison.

Westside Man of the Match: Innes Iain Morrison.