

Lewis and Harris League:

## **Carloway 3 (2) Westside 1 (1)**

Archie MacDonald 12

Innes Iain Morrison 4

Callum Masson 37

Neil Sinclair 73

*At Cnoc a' Choilich, Carloway.*

*Monday, 28th May, 2018, 19.00.*

*Referee: Kenneth "Bugsy" Smith.*

*Carloway line judge: Alasdair "Tiger" Macarthur.*

*Westside line judge: Ewen Macaskill*

**CARLOWAY:** 4-5-1.

*Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.*

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

*David Beaton*

*Callum "Beag" Mackay Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Donald "D.I." MacIennan Joe Armstrong*

*Callum Masson Eachainn Miller Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Stuart "Bubble" Macdonald Archie MacDonald*

*Neil Sinclair*

*Subs. used: Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald (Callum Masson) 81; Andy "Bernera" Morrison (Eachainn Miller) 86.*

*Subs. not used: Euan Gilmour; Matthew Murray.*

*Yellow cards: None.*

**WESTSIDE:** 3-5-2.

*Manager: "Murchadh" Macdonald.*

*Asst. Manager: Stuart "Tyson" Campbell.*

*Luke Mackay Scott Graham (capt.)*

*Alex John Morrison ■ Innes Iain Morrison Dan Macphail Robert Shirkie Martainn Shields*

*Donnie "Noe" Smith Ali Williamson Gordon Campbell*

*Iain Gillies*

*Subs. used: Sam Mackay (Dan Macphail) 78; Duncan Shirkie (Martainn Shields) 79.*

*Subs. not used: Euan Shirkie; Ruairidh MacIennan; Dan Macleod.*

*Yellow cards: Alex John Morrison (dissent) 67.*

Obviously the events of three days before influenced the thoughts of "Windy" and "Murchadh" going into this crucial League encounter. The lessons that could be taken from that result are inconclusive. However, certain inferences were evident: tonight's visitors, even with something approaching a full, normal line-up on Friday, had eventually been squeezed out of the home tie, by a make-shift Carloway/Lochs/United squad, which took time to gel, then surged. Observed from Carloway's point of view, tonight's confrontation must have masked an apprehension that their normal club line-up might not be able to replicate Friday's form, especially in the later part of the game.

The Blues' performances, so far this season, have been mystifying: dominating for a half, not always the same half, then looking out of sorts in the other - always committed, but sometimes drifting. Tonight might be pivotal for both sides: last season the Siarachs looked as if they might be the team *du jour*, while Carloway seemed to be dropping out of sight, but as the season progressed, Carloway grew in

strength as West faded dramatically. Coming into this fixture, the sides' League fortunes already seemed to be gradually diverging: Westside going for it in the top half, among the challengers, beside Ness, Point, and Lochs; Carloway, struggling, in the lower half, with Back and the Stornoway sides, trying to find a definitive shape for the rest of the campaign. In other words, this had all the appearance of a "must-win" fixture for both sides, for different reasons - either to stay in the challenging pack, or join it.

In light of availability, na Gormaich's team-line was largely as predicted. David Beaton returned in goal, while Callum "Beag" Mackay stepped back from right wing/forward to right back/wing to allow Calum Masson to return in front of him to support Neil Sinclair, up front in place of Hamish Macdonald. Westside were familiar, though the captain, champion header-of the-ball, Scott Graham, started up front, with Innes Ian Morrison, in left midfield to the left of Dan Macphail.

Summer had arrived on the west of Lewis. A glorious, cloud-free evening, a light breeze, and a midge-free Cnoc a' Choilich welcomed 22 local heroes to battle for supremacy on George Spy's exquisitely cut pitch, which itself seemed worthy of a Chelsea Flower Show prize. An enormous partisan crowd had hardly greeted neighbours and friends before the Siarachs had struck through a piece of outstanding opportunism. In 4 minutes a Shields free-kick, from 22 metres on the Carloway right, was headed clear by Mackay to the edge of the area. Luke Mackay's attempt was blocked, the ball coming out to the West right, where Graham took possession, 25 metres from goal. As his marker moved on him, he turned right, then twisted and turn to his left to lay the ball off to Innes Iain square. Morrison had time to look up then send a brilliantly-flighted right-footer over the ruck and deep into Beaton's left-hand corner (**0-1**).

Nevertheless, the lead only lasted 7 minutes, before a Domhnall Mackay free-kick, to the right of the centre-line, came in high over the West back-line. Smith couldn't quite reach it and it skited on to the left, where Archie MacDonald managed to muscle his way behind Campbell and bring the ball down. As Gillies advanced, he fired the ball home from 14 metres, low to the keeper's left (**1-1**).

Two minutes later Miller was supplied in the centre circle, and stormed forward, then picked out Callum "Beag", diagonally on his right. Callum "Beag" immediately broke at speed behind Morrison. His searching cross, 18 metres from the line, was headed out by Smith, but MacDonald, following up on the left, took possession, only for his attempt from 20 metres to be blocked. Then a second drive by Mackay was blocked by Williamson, before the ball was cleared.

In 22 minutes, the home side survived a penalty claim when a Shields corner from the Siarach right was met perfectly by Graham, 16 metres out and just inside the near box. His strong header shot across goal diagonally but a Mackay elbow appeared to prevent it beating Beaton inside his right-hand post. As West turned the screw, they came close again in the 28th minute when Graham, fed by Campbell and coming to midway within the Carloway half towards the right, found Mackay in front of him, but the young star's instant strike was blocked by the covering Mackay. The ball came back to Shields, 20 metres from goal on the right. The wing-man then turned in square and smacked a low left-footer which Beaton did well to beat away

to his right, then to block a second attempt by the supporting Mackay for a corner.

However, it was a sharp, breaking move that gave na Gormaich the lead in 37 minutes when a Mackay/"Bubble"/Masson move through the centre circle saw the ball played straight forward to Sinclair, facing them, midway within the West half. He contrived to wriggle off Smith to his left, then send a crisp right-foot forward diagonal to Masson, breaking forward like Alan Wells behind Morrison towards the right touch-line. Sixteen metres from the line and 12 outside Gillies' left-hand post, he suddenly checked, then jinxed straight back leftwards across Williamson, before lifting the neatest of left-foot lobs over the approaching keeper and inside the far post. A beauty! (2-1).

In 41 minutes Carloway manufactured another golden chance to increase their lead, when Masson played a short corner on the right back to Callum "Beag". His perfect cross glanced off a head or two in the centre before reaching Archie MacDonald, coming in at the back post, but his immediate attempt from 16 metres soared high over Gillies' bar.

### **Half-time: Carloway 2 Westside 1**

It was unforgiving, combative fare, Cup Final stuff in appearance as the significance of the occasion appeared to impel the combatants forward, through their opponents. And it was unrelenting. In 46 minutes, a Shields corner on the right was met full-on in the centre, 16 metres from goal, by Graham, but whizzed a foot over the central bar. Carloway replied two minutes later when "Bubble" and Mackay combined to send Callum "Beag" free down the right touch-line. His searching cross, 16 metres from the line, cleared Sinclair and Smith in the centre but was gathered by Miller beyond the far post. He checked back from the bye-line and 12 metres out whipped round to send a nasty low right-foot hook to the right of Gillies, guarding his near post, but the keeper got down sharply to push the ball away for a corner.

In 51 minutes Carloway almost put more distance between themselves and West as "Bubble" raced through the centre from his own half to find Miller in front of him. The young-blood wasted no time and sent the early Cantona inside "Noe" for Sinclair to ghost behind him into the box. Gillies rushed out as the Barrach hammered a low right-footer to his right, managing to partially block it, but the power of the shot took it through him, yet, miraculously, Ali Williamson had appeared on the goal-line behind him, to block the ball away.

The Siarachs tried to claw themselves back into contention in 56 minutes when a thunderous Shields free-kick from midway within the centre of the Carloway half was headed straight up and away by Mackay, 16 metres out in front of his own goal, but it was in 69 minutes that the visitors' big opportunity to regain equality came - and went. As a Carloway attack broke down midway within the West half, Morrison found Graham facing him on his right, just inside the opposition half, and the captain immediately hooked a left-foot lob over the high back-line, for Mackay to charge through unmarked into the left of the box. However, Beaton read it and came racing out just in time to beat away the young striker's attempt to lift the ball over him just inside his box.

Three minutes later it suddenly became a lot darker for Westside. An attack broke

down and Mackay, found "Bubble", who in turn found Miller moving down the right. His attempted cross, 16 metres from the line was blocked, but he managed to play the ball back, and it was eventually played across the line to find Mackay again, lurking outside the box on the left. He in turn made the bye-line before playing the ball straight back to Archie MacDonald, 16 metres from the line. The Uibhisteach then whacked across a low left-foot cross which Gillies, by his right-hand post, managed to get an arm to but couldn't prevent powering across him, past Smith on the line, then reaching Sinclair by the left-hand post. The striker stayed calm and stabbed the ball home (3-1).

A minute later the game was almost definitely over when Callum "Beag" was once more freed down the right by Miller. His sharp squared cross, 16 metres from goal, somehow evaded everyone by the near post to reach an unmarked MacDonald right in front of goal, but his first-time strike was last seen passing the Flannan Isles.

West's last opportunity arrived in 77 minutes when Graham, in the centre circle, played the ball forward to Mackay, midway within the Carloway half, and he immediately supplied the Jimmy McIlroy between "D.I." and Armstrong for Shields to charge into the right of the Blues' box. However, an alert Beaton rushed out to block his low drive brilliantly, low to his left for a corner.

### **Full-time: Carloway 3 (2) Westside 1 (1)**

How much would it cost to get into the Bernabeu, or the Camp Nou, or Anfield to witness a contest as thrilling as this? Certainly, more than a few pounds in a half-time collection. All right, you would see fitter specimens playing more skilfully and with greater tactical nous (perhaps!), but Zidane or Klopp would die to instil such commitment, industry, and hunger to win in their squads. Only an Aztec ball-game spilled more blood. No one was posted missing tonight, with outstanding performances from both captains, Domhnall Mackay and Scott Graham, "Tiger", "D.I.", and Callum "Beag"; Innes Iain, Luke Mackay, and Alex John; among others.

So, where does it leave both sides? What have they both learned? Obviously, it damaged West's League pretensions, while it enhanced na Gormaich's. Every League defeat in an eight-club League is a major blow. How strong are Ness, Point, and Lochs? Can the Blues or the Siarachs get back in the pack by defeating these sides? Tonight's performance was certainly encouraging for the home side, as everyone turned up, everyone wanted the ball, and together the squad members generated what was their best team performance in a long time, certainly so far this season. Hopefully, such a display can be replicated game after game. A tall order, perhaps, but possible.

**Carloway Man of the Match:** this was one of those nights where everyone performed well, but, perhaps, **Callum "Beag" Mackay** shaded it (on his 50th appearance, too!).

**Westside Man of the Match: Innes Iain Morrison.**