

Carloway 1 Lochs 3. 17/04/09

Stuart Rankin,

L. & H. League:

Carloway (1) 1 Lochs (3) 3

Alex Smith 25

Roddy Morrison 23

David Martin 33

Peter Mackenzie 44

Mindful, no doubt, of last season's two exciting league clashes, 4-4 at Leurbost and 2-3 to Lochs at Cnoc a' Choilich, this clash brought out a huge crowd on a beautiful clear spring night, spoilt a little by a strong pitch-length wind. The Blues hoped to build on an excellent second half performance at Goathill on Monday versus Aths but circumstances militated against this: Nomie was still out for Lochs with Roddie Morrison partnering Lava up front, but na Gormaich lost Kenny Dokus to a late call-off with a back strain; Squeg and Andrew V.P. were still unavailable, while Kenny Beag played, despite not looking fully fit, in midfield. Chris Macleod led the attack, with Alex Smith behind and squaring off him, and Kevin Gochan and Gordon Tago were deployed as withdrawn wing forwards on either flank.

A wind-assisted Carloway started well by taking the game to Lochs but were nearly caught out early on their right when David Martin eluded Calum Mackay, then Pongo, but coming into the area, he seemed to have too many options and his cross-cum-shot came to nothing. Then, on 12 minutes, one of Carloway's best chances: Chris Macleod managed to turn inside away from Ally Mackenzie and his stinging shot was beaten away by the Lochs keeper to his right. Chris was first in a scramble to the rebound but he thwacked his second try against the junction of bar and post and out. What might have been!

Next, Andy Murray had a classic run though the middle, beating one man, then another, then another, but just as he went to pull the trigger, the ball bobbed up, and his shot ended up on the Pentland Road. Lochs were imposing themselves now, albeit abetted by an ankle injury to Calum Moody who opted, and probably shouldn't have, to stay on in a central midfield role. Lava brought out a great save from Gordon Craigie; David Martin was crowded out in the penalty area as he moved onto a superb crossfield pass, before he and Andy Murray worked some interpassing magic down at Carloway's right corner flag, then Andy did a Ronaldo on the defender - three times! - and crossed low and hard from the bye-line for Roddie Morrison to convert.

A sigh of "Here we go" seemed to ripple through the home crowd. However, Carloway surprised the crowd by equalising, almost immediately: a low cross from the right came to Alex Smith in a central position about 20 metres out, and he placed a neat right foot drive just inside Lochs' s left-hand post. Simplicity itself! Nevertheless, it was only a stay of execution because the Lochs machine was now fully revved up. Andrew Tago and Domhnall Mackay at central back were in danger of being overwhelmed.

Na Gormaich were lacking weight and leadership in midfield despite Kenny Maclennan playing like three men and being as assertive as ever; Gordon Tago and Kevin Gochan were dropping further and further back to assist, Alex Smith was drawn back too, and Chris Macleod was left isolated up front. The class and composure of Andy Murray and dogged application of John Uig controlled the centre of the park and the speed and movement of Lochs off the ball was increasingly hard to combat. So the goals came: on 33 minutes Murray did another impromptu soft-shoe-shuffle in the same area as his first and set up David Martin this time for the tap-in. John Uig had a free-kick blocked, then Roddie Morrison crossed a high hanging ball from the left for Peter Mackenzie to head in unchallenged.

The second half was a bit flat. Calum Moody didn't reappear and Billy Anderson, Seamus Macleod, and Dan Crossley came on at various points for the Blues but Carloway were unable to pressure Lochs in any sustained way. Indeed, they looked in greater danger of losing more. On 54 minutes Lava converted in typical Lava style but was just offside; John Uig cracked the top of the crossbar from a 25-metre free-kick on the left with nine minutes left; moments later David Martin burst through but fired high, then a minute later a high cross pass from defence cleared Pongo but Edwin Van Der Craigie just managed to claw it away spectacularly from the advancing Lava. The final real chance came from a beautiful through ball from Billy Anderson to Seamus Macleod but his shot was blocked.

An unhappy night for the Blues as they never came close to matching the relentless Lochs machine which appears likely to go on ... and on ... and on: Nomie can't play, so Roddie comes in, and stars. Nomie is unmissed. Who's Nomie? The transition, as at Man. Utd., is seamless, the mark of a top club. This didn't happen for the Blues. Perhaps Carloway depend more on players like Kenny Dokus and Squeg than we realise. They certainly missed them - and Scott Macaulay up front. No player can be faulted for effort; they are as committed a team of young men as any manager would wish. Indeed, Pongo, Domhnall (who probably shaded Carloway's best on the night from Pongo and Gordon), and Gordon were heroic at the back and Kenny Maclennan, despite everything, was as tenacious in midfield as John Uig; the rest were tireless, but they still couldn't match or even stem the opposition.

By the end, even Robert Mackenzie was having dribbles from the back and shots at goal. Lochs had no discernible weakness, something an opponent could identify and exploit. My Man of the Match - by the proverbial mile - was, of course, Andy Murray who was instrumental in practically everything that happened for them, with a faultless classy display. It's only a matter of time before George Burley is on the phone, maybe Walter Smith too; I've heard they're short of a midfielder!