

Lewis & Harris League:

Harris 5 (1) Carloway 0 (0)

Steven Lennie 12, 79

Davie Grant 52

Andrew VP 60 (o.g.)

Norman Morrison 90+2

At Rally Park

29.5.09

Gordon Craigie

Calum Moody DI Maclennan Andrew VP

Kevin Macleod Billy Anderson Murdo Sqweg Alex Smith Gordon Tago (89)

Kenny Maclennan Dan Crossley

Substitutes used: Seumas Macleod (Alex Smith) 45

Ah, the highs and lows of football in Lewis; after a sublime victory on Monday night against a class side, na Gormaich ran into an express train at Rally Park tonight. Excuses can be made, e.g. important absences, a 'flukish' goal, an unlucky own goal, etc., but that would be insulting to a spirited Harris team, hungry for a win after their unhappy loss at Cnoc a' Choilich a fortnight ago, who repeatedly took the game to Carloway in swift concerted attacks that had the defence stretched to transparency for most of the second half. Fortunately for the Blues, the Hearachs only converted about 25% of the chances they created. Circumstances necessitated an unusual Blues' line-up: Andrew VP joined Calum Moody and DI Maclennan at the back, with Peter Dokus choosing to flood the midfield, and Dan Crossley and Kenny Maclennan leading.

A beautiful windless evening in Tarbert occasioned the appearance of the first midges of 2009. An even opening was ended by a curious goal: Steven Lennie burst forward and blasted a high swirling shot towards Craigie from about 22 metres. It seemed set for West Loch Tarbert but suddenly dipped and twisted under the bar, completely deceiving Craigie - and most in Rally Park - to his left. Carloway didn't panic -yet- but kept their shape and pushed: Crossley did well on the left, then Kenny Beag had a good run and shot saved, before David Beaton saved well after a Crossley cutback.

The Hearachs had a dangerous series of corners untidily scrambled clear before Gochan and Calum Moody, from a header, tested Beaton. Dokus was continually tweaking the Carloway formation with the back three constantly interchanging to cope with elusive front men; Alex Smith came right, behind Gochan, and Tago deep, to help fill gaps exploited by Harris, whose wide men were finding oceans of space behind Carloway's wingmen, to supply Lennie and Grant. The danger signs were there for the Blues although it remained a tit-for-tat first half : Fuggy fired over when freed centrally, from about 24 metres, and then Billy Anderson had a shot well-saved. When na

Gormach survived a strong penalty claim for a Calum Moody handball on 42 minutes, we seemed set for a similar second period, especially when Beaton had to flick a difficult Sqweg free-kick over his bar.

An unhappy Alex Smith was sacrificed at half-time to introduce Seumas Macleod to a more aggressive formation in the second half, with Kenny Beag dropping back, but the nightmare began too quickly to allow it to be successful. Calum Moody's headed back-pass was read and intercepted by David Grant, who rounded Craigie and converted. Then Carlows were fortunate again when a Lennie goal was adjudged offside - mmmm?- before Kenny Beag went close, but immediately the wheels really came off when a Harris shot thumped the post, rebounded across goal and a back-rushing Andrew VP couldn't avoid it.

The Blues' defence was being pulled repeatedly out of shape now and the midfield was stuttering, as the Hearachs surged and passed up several opportunities, especially on the right. The problem was still the fast-breaking of Harris down or diagonally into each forward wing-space, especially on the left, fired by Calum Smith, and swiftly supported by each wing-back; this was dragging the Blues' back three apart, unsure who was to track the slippery Lennie or lean on a difficult-to-handle Grant. Gochan was now playing right defensive midfield. Tago was mainly isolated wide left, although he did have a couple of good runs towards the end, and Seumas and Dan were the loneliest men in Harris up front. Another calamity followed from a corner headed back in; Craigie seemed to handle safely but collided with Tago at the right-hand post; the ball dropped on the line and a delighted Lennie tapped in.

Carlows tried to force it, but, of course, sometimes the harder you try, the worse it gets, and eventually no one could do anything right, discipline departed, and all shape was lost. In injury-time, from a corner on Carlows' right, an unmarked Taz nodded home from about 6 metres. Right on the whistle Sqweg sent in a beautiful free-kick from the left; Gochan ghosted in behind the defence and met the ball about 6 metres out in front of goal, with Beaton stranded. It went straight up - and that, more or less, summed up the Blues' second half pain.

After Henning Ovrembo's masterclass in **Terrible Refereeing** in the Chelsea v. Barcelona game, Guus Hiddink chastised his players for dwelling on the "*mistakes*" the referee made and what it cost Chelsea. His advice was, in football, you had a one-off discussion about such things, learned a few sharp lessons, and moved on to the next challenge. Carlows have to do the same: it was a so-bad-it-was-funny second half for them and full marks to Harris for exploiting every uncertainty, with Steven Lennie (my Man of the Match), David Grant, and Calum Smith outstanding.

How the Hearachs have changed in a year! The Blues obviously suffered from one or two key absences but that's nothing new for island teams;

however, they seemed mainly uncomfortable with the shape they played. Although Peter Dokus tried his best to recast this continually, he was frustrated by limited options. No one individually played badly; they simply lost coherence, then communication, then their discipline as a team, the longer the game went on. Dan Crossley would shade my Carloway Man of the Match, for his tireless application and industry, just ahead of the tenacious Kenny Beag, who also came close a couple of times after excellent runs.