

Lewis & Harris League:

United 0 (0) Carloway 1 (1)

Seumas Macleod 40

At Goathill

3.8.09

Referee: George Macaskill

Gordon Craigie

Calum Moody Andrew Maciver (capt.) Domhnall Mackay DI MacIennan

Darren Mackinnon Kenny MacIennan Kenny Dokus Kevin Macleod

Seumas Macleod Ross Bremner (53?)

Substitutes used: Gordon Tago (Kevin Macleod) 76; Donald Chisholm (Seumas Macleod) 79; Alex Smith (Kenny Dokus) 86.

On a dull, but dry, windless evening, the Blues returned to Goathill, a scene, this season, of very mixed fortune, hopeful of extending their run of 7 consecutive League victories. Tonight they faced one of the three teams to inflict League defeat on them this season, 3-1 at Cnoc a' Choilich, in a game not unaffected by controversial decisions and a disputed sending-off. An example of the latter similarly affected the outcome of tonight's contest.

There were two enforced changes to the Carloway line-up from Barvas, with Kevin Gochan taking over from an out-of-sorts Gordon Tago at left forward midfield, Tago dropping to the bench, and Seumus Macleod slotting into the still-injured Dan Crossley's place beside Ross Bremner in attack. There was a young look to United, with notable absences, especially DJ Clinton and Allan Don Mackenzie up front, who had given the Blues such a torrid time in the earlier League meeting.

Despite League form, it was United who took the early initiative, in an industrious opening in which they had the bulk of possession and pressured the Blues, without being particularly dangerous. An early free-kick was cleared for a corner, then scrambled away. Tom Lawrence shot over from about 22 metres on 14 minutes, then, 5 minutes later, came their best chance so far. A sharp move to the right led to a rasper from 16 metres being blocked by Craigie; the ball spun back over his head, but he recovered excellently to drop on the loose ball as an attacker approached.

Then, on 23 minutes, the tenor of the game was undeniably altered: on the halfway line Bremner went in from behind on Mark McGee. McGee reacted angrily, with a half-hearted swipe that didn't connect. The referee appeared to let the game run but had to call a halt as the players confronted each other. There was an angry scene and Calum Campbell tried to hustle Mark away. The red card was flourished and a visibly annoyed Mark McGee was off, apparently for bad language.

Without their most effective performer, United lost their rhythm for a time and the game swung na Gormaich's way. A Kenny Dokus crossball was just too long for Bremner. A beautiful move down the right saw Mackinnon find

Bremner running free; he beat off a crunching tackle to cross perfectly for Gochan 6 metres out in front of goal, but he headed well wide. Five minutes later, Bremner was released on the left and another perfect cross found Macleod in the same position and this time the header gave Macphee no chance.

United managed to regroup and largely negate Kenny Beag and Kenny Dokus in the second half, but despite possession and strong running, chances still eluded the Wasps. Indeed, opportunity came Carloway's way, as United pressed the game, mainly due to Bremner's tireless running. Bremner shot over, then Macphee saved well from a quiet Gochan. A Calum Moody header from a corner was cleared off the line, before Bremner turned in from the left and cracked a beauty from 22 metres towards Macphee's top left-hand corner. However, the keeper pulled off the save of the season to flick it over with his left hand. In the last 15 minutes, United threw everyone forward, sensing the possibility of an unlikely equaliser. Lewis Uig was like Napoleon on Elba as even Sandy Morrison and Tom Lawrence drove into midfield but still clear-cut opportunity escaped them, due mainly to clean handling by Craigie and aggressive stopping by Pongo and Domhnall, while Calum Moody and DI kept United's wing men deep for their crosses.

It also left United dangerously exposed to the long clearance and on 80 minutes Bremner latched on to one, had only to beat one man, and ran clear in on goal. Martin Macphee did his Harald Schumacher, didn't commit/ lunge, stood big, and Ross had to lift the ball over him - and over the bar. Then, deep in injury-time, the chance came at last for the Stornoway boys: a cross ball broke in a crowded area to the sub (Fraser?), on the left edge of the 6 metre box, but he totally miskicked and the ball was eventually swept away for a corner.

United's problems were clearly in setting up the chances and striking. Martin Macphee gave a top-class performance in goal and, apart from the last quarter of an hour when they were alarmingly over-stretched, Sandy Morrison, Lewis Uig, and Tom Lawrence coped adequately at the back. However, despite the best efforts of Calum Campbell and Liam Coleman in midfield, Innes Smith up front, the breaks would not come.

Losing Mark McGee so early altered everything too. It galvanised their effort but didn't make them equally effective. For Carloway, Ross Bremner is like a constantly over-wound clockwork toy: tireless, ubiquitous, and hungry, but despite his endless running, Carloway's attack was not that much more effective than United's, even though the ball did run for them, and the midfield rarely fired at all, although Kenny Beag was his usual dogged, tenacious self, with one great drive blocked late on.

Na Gormaich's successful League run is built on a stable, solid, and relentlessly pugnacious back four and competent goalkeeper, who inspire confidence in each other and those in front of them. Domhnall Mackay would be my Carloway Man of the Match as Pongo and he turned in sterling performances (they're setting a very high standard); Calum Moody's and DI'

s desire to push forward is admirable, while Craigie' s handling was exemplary.