

Lewis and Harris League:

## Lochs 3 (1) Carloway 2 (2)

*John Uig 7, 90+3  
Nommie 84*

*Andrew Maciver 6  
Kenny MacIennan 45*

*At Leurbost*

*26.8.09*

*Ref.: Alan Iain Macleod*

*Gordon Craigie*

*Darren Mackinnon Calum Tom Moody Domhnall Mackay DI MacIennan  
Alex Smith Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Kenny MacIennan Gordon "Tago" Macdonald  
Seumas Macleod Andrew Maciver(capt.)*

*Substitutes used: Billy Anderson (Kenny Dokus) 70; Calum Mackay (Seumas Macleod) 79 (90?)*

Defeat is a bitter pill to swallow, especially when it arrives in the third minute of injury-time. Not for the first time this season, a disgruntled Carloway left the field, angry at refereeing decisions, each other, the break of the ball, and the gods in general; after all, with only six minutes of normal time remaining, they probably believed they were about to win, but now the prospect of second place in the League is rapidly disappearing over the horizon, and that coveted Europa League spot gone forever.

Ross Bremner was unavailable, but Andrew Maciver rejoined the pool, so, instead of disturbing a settled back line who had performed well here in the Lewis Cup, Peter Dokus elected to start him up front in his old position, as striker, beside Seumas Macleod. Lochs, also, had a settled look, although Roddy Morrison stood in - and well - for Ally Mackenzie at the back.

As usual, there was an explosive opening: a long ball released Lava to run in on Craigie, but the keeper completed his warm-up with an excellent block. Then Mackay broke well out of defence and sent a long, Beckham-type ball out to the left, where Gordon Tago gathered well to test the Lochs' right. A flashing run and early cross was met square-on by Pongo in front of goal to head forcefully past Houston. Moments later a Macmillan free-kick on the right, about 20 metres out, was squared to an unmarked John Uig, who had time to place a careful right-foot shot past Craigie to his left.

Both teams' approach seemed identical to that of ten days earlier: Carloway retreated en masse to mark space; DI tracked Nommie, and remained hopeful of the quick break to link up with the fast-running Macleod or Tago or the head of Pongo; Lochs' midfield spread, moved fast into open space, and struck the early ball, with Nommie in best Wiltord-style - turning, twisting, moving off marker- to set up advancing midfielders or the lurking Lava.

In a sense, both sides' tactics worked - for an hour - with the bulk of possession and chances falling to Lochs. Craigie was on double-time: Macmillan was sent free on the left from a free-kick but the keeper got to it well with his foot; then Nommie set up Martin but as he raced into the box, Craigie blocked superbly at his feet. A prone Martin managed to poke the

rebound towards goal but it was booted clear. Tago eluded his marker on the left to cross but Macleod headed well over, before a Pongo turn and shot just went past. Robert Mackenzie shot over when well-placed; then Lava converted on the half-hour, only to be ruled off-side.

On half-time Kenny Beag found Alex Smith running on the left, before moving swiftly into the box to meet the crossed return about 6 metres out on the right-hand side and volley it past a helpless Houston.

Right away, na Gormaich almost increased their lead when a Calum Tom header from a corner was cleared off the line but the pattern of play simply continued from the first half. If anything, Lochs' pressure inexorably increased, with Kenny Beag operating totally in a Makalele role, and Gordon Tago as an auxiliary left-back. The Blues' midfield effectively disappeared, and, with Pongo tiring, Macleod was left like Napoleon on Elba up front. However, Lochs had to wait till 67 minutes before their first clear chance came when Tippex had a great run from the back, but shot past. Then Lava took advantage of a lucky break of the ball to home in on goal but muffed his final touch. A moment later he mishit again in front of goal.

Carloway' s intentions were plain when a defender, Calum Mackay, replaced Macleod. Just when it seemed Carloway might hold out, the breakthrough came in the most straightforward of ways, Nommie converting at the near post from a corner on the right. The Blues' last real push led to a scramble in the box from a corner, with the ball finally being cleared off the line, yet again, and away. In the last two minutes of normal time, Lochs had a strong penalty claim denied when Calum Tom appeared to bring down Lava as he moved past him in the box, then Craigie seemed to have saved a point for Carloway at the death with a brilliant save to his right from a Lava header directly in front of goal.

Nevertheless, the clincher came with a John Uig strike which was a mirror image of his first goal. A disputed free-kick on the left was slipped in to him, unmarked 20 metres out, and his strong right-foot drive went through a ruck of players to beat an unsighted Craigie low to his right.

Many of the comments about the Lewis Cup game apply here, only this time it was the Claret and Blues' turn to score more goals, hence win. The match was won, and lost, in the midfield. In the first half, there was little between the sides, but the gap in performance lengthened considerably in the second. It is to Lochs' credit that they are relentless till the final whistle, always seeking a goal, never conceding.

Even if Carloway had scored a third, or a fourth - and they could well have, if St. Christopher was a kinder patron saint - Lochs would still have sought ultimate victory. There were no mistakes this time at the back, and the performance of the midfield was exemplary. Fortunately for Carloway, David Martin had a quieter game than usual and Lava's fine tuning was out, but Nommie and David Macmillan were as elusive and inventive as ever, and were largely responsible for this win.

It's little consolation, perhaps, tonight for the Blues but these two fixtures have shown that, at last, they can actually compete with the best team on the island. There were many positive aspects to their display: once again, Craigie, the back four, with Kenny Beag blunting everything just in front, were outstanding and formed a barrier which kept them in contention to the bitter end, as the midfield were overpowered and Lochs poured forward; and Gordon Tago, my Carloway Man of the Match, had an excellent first half (as had Seumas Macleod), running at the defence, and delivering the early, inviting cross; unfortunately, after an hour he had to metamorphose into Ashley Cole as Carloway were ground back but he contributed equally effectively in that role.

So Carloway move onwards to Ness now in the quest for Runners-Up spot, with the hope in the background that Back and Aths do each other serious damage on the same night.