

Lewis and Harris League:

Carloway 1 (0) Back 1 (0)

Domhnall Mackay (pen.) 60 Fraser Macleod 82

At Cnoc a'Choilich

30.4.10

Ref.:D. J. Maclean

Gordon Craigie

Calum Moody Andrew Maciver (capt.) Domhnall Mackay

Darren Mackinnon Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod Kenny "Beag" MacIannan Donnie Macphail

Kevin "Gochan" Macleod Dan Crossley Gordon Tago

Subs.: Ed Ansell (Calum Moody) 59; Seumas Macleod (Dan Crossley) 70; Archie MacDonald (Kevin Macleod) 84.

A mild and sunny Spring afternoon in the west had been replaced by the usual cold windy evening as the teams took the field at Cnoc a'Choilich. Amazingly, Domhnall Mackay was passed fit, and joined the returned Pongo in the Blues' customary back three line-up; Kenny Dokus was still out, and Gochan moved from attacking right midfielder to a central attacking role on Crossley's right, with Mackinnon reprising his first-half performance at Ness at right wing-back.

Despite playing into a strong northerly, Carloway still managed to take the game to the Bacachs and dictate its early shape. An intriguing contest developed: the Blues' back three wasted no time clearing their lines and kept the ball in the Back half where Crossley chased and harried as tirelessly as he did on Friday, while Sqweg, Kenny Beag, and Macphail tried to impose a pattern on na Gormaich's attacks. Ross Hall et al, however, looked comfortable under pressure, though Crossley's elusiveness was a constant irritant; it did stem Hall's creativity, nevertheless, and his trademark fast, low diagonals to the breaking Chris Adams or Murray Macleod rarely featured in the opening half, while Fraser Macleod had to plough a lonely furrow.

Martin Maclean and the Back midfield were too involved in head-to-head face-offs with the Carloway midfield to surge forward, to supply and back-up. Indeed, the dominance of the opposing defences permitted an astonishingly tiny number of scoring opportunities for such a fiercely-contested meeting: on 15 minutes a slight mix-up in the Back defence meant a passback header went over the approaching Maciver on the edge of the box, but no Carloway player was nearby; then a Kenny Beag run set up Crossley but he misfired. Approaching half-time, a deep Mackinnon cross was scrambled clear, before Fraser Macleod sent his best chance of the half narrowly past on the right. On 41 minutes Gochan supplied Tago on the left and his searching low cross found Crossley running in on the near post about 8 metres out but heavy policing prevented him connecting cleanly.

In the second half and now with the wind, Carloway managed to maintain control. The loss of Chris Adams, the victim of a bone-shuddering Mackay tackle just before the interval, damaged Back on 54 minutes, just as Dan Crossley sent a delicate right-foot lob shot just past Maciver's top right junction. On the hour, Ed Ansell replaced the injured Moody and his first contribution to proceedings was to be brought down by a clumsy lunge as he surged into the right side of a crowded penalty area. Mackay sent a perfectly-placed low shot into Ali Tolsta's left-hand corner.

Strangely enough, the long-awaited breakthrough brought Back to life, and Carloway's grip on the game faded away alarmingly. First Fraser Macleod was sent free on the right of the box but he pulled his shot across goal and wide, before Inny Red and he somehow managed to fail to convert a double chance on the 6-metre box on 71 minutes, after a Craigie block had led to a stramash in the Blues' area. Moments later, Seumas Macleod, on for the exhausted

Crossley, was denied twice by Ali Tolsta, as he tried to convert after a Squeg shot had been spilled. The Bacachs finally equalised when a through ball sent Fraser Macleod in on goal to shoot past the exposed Craigie.

Excellent entertainment - a quality product marketed by two evenly-matched competitors! Last year's battles (when Back thought they should have won, but lost, in Carloway, while the Blues are convinced the exact same thing happened to them at Garrabost) gave this game the necessary frisson to engross the spectators; a history between teams can be positive and can lead to tense confrontations like this.

First hour Carloway's; last half-hour Back's. Lesson 1: kill off the competition when you are in the ascendancy. Ross Hall (my Back Man of the Match) was mainly responsible for this, spending 70 minutes trying to subdue Dan Crossley, then after he got rid of him, 20 minutes being creative; in this he was abetted by Martin Maclean who also had an excellent last quarter.

Dan Crossley (my Carloway Man of the Match) didn't have many chances, but successfully tied up Hall, Ox Macleod, etc. and in turn caused Back's midfield to look back rather than move forward. It was significant the Back surge began when he departed, though commitment was strong and unwavering throughout, with the last line - Calum Tom, Pongo, and Domhnall - especially adamant.