

Lewis and Harris League:

Athletic 2 (1) Carloway 2 (1)

Ali Walker 10

Calum Moody 36

Scott Maciver 59

Archie Macdonald 47

At Goathill Park.

25.06.10

Ref.: Ewen Macaskill.

Gordon Craigie

*Donald 'DI' MacIennan Andrew 'Pongo' Maciver (capt.) Calum Tom Moody
Kevin 'Gochan' Macleod Donnie Macphail Kenny 'Beag' MacIennan Murdo 'Squegg'
Macleod Gordon 'Tago' Macdonald
Seumas Macleod Archie Macdonald*

Subs. used: Kevin Anderson (Murdo Macleod) 72; Andrew V.P. Macleod (Donald MacIennan) 76.

If ever a game illustrated the old adage, "A game of two halves," tonight's did. After being stung early by a classic counter-attack, something that seems to be becoming a rather quaint local habit, the Blues dominated proceedings for an hour, edging ahead and looking likely to add convincingly to their lead, before disappearing rapidly from midfield as a resurgent Aths outfit strove to claim three points. Holidays, weddings, and injuries continued to haunt Peter Dokus: Domhnall Mackay, Ben Esslemont, and Ed Ansell were still unavailable, Dan Crossley injured, and Kenny Dokus not 100% fit. Continuing issues with firepower up front saw Kevin Anderson dropping to the bench, with Seumas Macleod and Archie Macdonald forming a starting partnership, Kenny MacIennan as central enforcer, and DI MacIennan alongside Pongo and Calum Tom.

The Blues started aggressively and a flurry of crippling corners, Tago on the right, Macphail on the left, high into the 6-metre box, put Macritchie under early pressure. However, over-confidence against a stretched defence led to over-commitment, and when Athletic broke fast on 10 minutes, wide down the left, the defence was late, and a quick square ball right, left Walker unmarked moving towards the edge of the box; he steadied himself and unleashed a low, right foot screamer as far away from Craigie as it could go, just inside the foot of his right-hand post. Perfect finishing!

Na Gormaich were unfazed and continued to press: Macleod broke right but Macdonald could not quite get on the end of his hard, low cross; then the same player cut in from the left but his right-foot drive was miscued. However, Aths were still swift and dangerous on the break and Scott Maciver was having anything but a quiet night: on 19 minutes he slipped his marker into oceans of space on the right but his cross found no takers. The Aths' tactic under pressure was the fast early ball to clear the midfield or back line for Maciver or Walker to run on to, while the other moved off square to back up or receive. Even losing Garry Macleod early did not alter this. Suddenly Pongo was caught deep on the left trying to do a Roger Byrne out of defence, but the subsequent cross led to a dreadful Aths miss directly in front of goal.

Carloway held together, then, on 25 minutes, drew their own lethal weapon,

Gordon Tago, into the fray: first, he sent the Blues' first real shot narrowly past from 20 metres. Then, a run and high, swirling cross was scrambled away for a corner from which he himself sent a vicious curler into the 6-metre box; it was glanced on to the left, lifted back in by Macdonald, and Pongo headed just over. Moments later, however, another nasty Tago corner allowed Moody to crash home a free header from 6 metres. Athletic retaliated immediately, when a Maciver cross from the right was smacked on to Craigie's right-hand post. The half ended with Pongo releasing Gochan moving into the right of the box but Macritchie brilliantly beat his strike away.

Straightaway, Carloway were ahead as Gochan was freed down the right to square a low cross for Macdonald to flick past Macritchie first-time, though Athletic were unhappy, believing that the ball might have been put into touch earlier, as a defender lay injured. For a period na Gormaich were hot: an exquisite Macphail flick over the back line let Macdonald advance on the left of goal but his lob over the keeper went just past. Then Kenny Beag headed over, before a whole sea-change took place in the course of the game. Ali Walker received the ball on the right, about 22 metres out, left Pongo for dead, then ran in to supply Maciver bursting through in the centre to convert from 8 metres.

Although Tago had another mazy run on 74 minutes to set up Kevin Anderson, who had just strayed marginally offside, in the final half-hour the balance of play now swung decisively in favour of the Goathill side, as the Blues' midfield fragmented and their back three were unable to contain the Aths' strike force. Walker twice lost his marker to test Craigie before Maciver raced clear on 79 minutes towards goal. Calum Moody and he had a wrestling match heading into the box and the striker went down. Again, it was one of those incidents that you read according to which team you support: was it or wasn't it? If it was a foul, it was inside the box, hence a penalty. However, after an eternity, a foul was awarded - but on the edge of the box! The free-kick was well-struck, but just over.

Archie Macdonald opened the defence for Gochan to have a final attempt well-saved, before Maciver almost sealed victory on 89 minutes with a turn on the edge of the box and shot which flashed just past Craigie's right-hand post.

The best striker on the island continues to haunt Carloway, although he has a rival for this title in Ali Walker, his co-hammer of the Blues. Both play in the final third, they want to score goals but are not selfish, and their running off the ball and creation of personal space is exemplary; also, Scott's pace from a standing start is remarkable - what is his time for the 100 metres? Perhaps a back three is not the best defence against such opposition, although DI had an excellent return to League duty. Despite gradually losing a grip at the back, na Gormaich competed well for an hour, and with a little more luck, might have had the game won by then, as Seumas Macleod reprised his endless-motion EaF2 performance versus Back, while Archie Macdonald stole around like a young Lou Macari. Also, when Gordon Tago and Kevin Macleod get the ball at feet, facing the opposition, and have not fallen too far back, they are very tricky customers to deal with, especially if they stay wide and stretch the defence; both have nasty shots, and Gordon Tago's corners were world-class - the stuff of nightmares for a goalkeeper, although Colin

Macritchie handled them as well as any keeper could.
Carloway Man of the Match: Gordon Tago Macdonald.
Athletic Man of the Match: Scott Maciver.