

Lewis and Harris League:

United 8 (4)

Daniel Keenan 12, 36, 40 (pen.), 72, 90+2

Liam Coleman 24

Scott Munro 49

Scott Nicolson 85

Carloway 4 (2)

Gordon Macdonald 20

Murdo Macleod 37

Archie Macdonald (pen.) 70, 78

At Goathill Park

Ref.: Calum Macleod

23.8.10

Gordon Craigie

Andrew 'Tago' Maciver (capt.) Calum Moody Domhnall Mackay Andrew 'VP' Macleod

Donnie Macphail Dan Crossley Murdo 'Squegg' Macleod Gordon 'Tago' Macdonald

Kevin 'Gochan' Macleod Seumas Macleod

Subs. used: Archie Macdonald (Donnie Macphail) 45; Calum Mackay (Calum Moody) 72; Kevin Anderson (Gordon Macdonald) 76.

Red Card: Kevin Macleod 50

"Where do I begin, To tell the story, Of how great a" a what? There isn't a word in any language, English or Gaelic, that could encompass the full extent of the disaster that befell Carloway at Goathill tonight. It really was a *"Things fall apart, The centre cannot hold"* evening. Nearly everything that could go wrong, did, badly, sometimes often; throw in a bit of ill-luck, then an effervescent United side, full of youthful running and inventiveness, who deserved most of what they achieved, maybe more, and the casual observer will understand why a dark cloud as dense as a nuclear winter imprisoned the Carloway squad within their dressing room, long after a merciful final whistle. One or two changes forced Dokus's hand, or were desired: Andrew Macleod came in at left-back for the unavailable Benn Esslemont and Saturday's substitutes started: Dan Crossley in central midfield for the absent Kenny MacIennan (work), and Seumas Macleod up front for Archie Macdonald, who dropped to the bench alongside Kevin Anderson and an old face returning, Calum Mackay.

An inauspicious opening did not augur well for the Blues: two minutes in, 30 metres out on the right touchline, Pongo, under pressure, but faced with the easier option of Macphail 5 metres away, chose the long pass back to Craigie, unaware of Kevin Macmillan, lurking in the centre behind the defence; the striker nipped in before the keeper, spun left round him, and "converted" from 6 metres, only for Craigie to make an astonishing recovery and get back to somehow block the ball for a corner with his right leg. Carloway responded immediately, when Macleod, freed by Crossley on the right, fired past from 16 metres, then Gochan was blocked, but, already, warning signs were flashing. A dangerous sense of looseness in defence and midfield due to an apparent lack of recognition of the quality of the opposition resulted in an imprecise zonal approach to marking, which was not fixed or personal, and hazardous with a high back-line, lying square, who seemed more intent on pushing forward than picking up free-running attackers. Pongo constantly drove right, allowing an enormous gap to develop on Carloway's

right, pulling Mackay and Moody right; Andrew V.P. continually moved centre to cover, which, in turn, allowed a similar opening left. Macphail and Tago lay wide as attacking midfielders, while Crossley surged in support of Gochan and Macleod at every opportunity, leaving Sqwegg to patrol an enormous expanse of the exposed centre.

An inevitable opener arrived from a lofted free-kick wide on the left, 30 metres out, headed home neatly by Keenan from 8 metres out. Na Gormaich upped the tempo, and were rewarded: a deep Pongo cross, 30 metres out on the right touchline, seemed too long, but Tago, almost on the left bye-line, 4 metres from goal, sent a powerful looping header over the upstretched hands of Cal Macleod and just inside the far post. As fine a headed strike as you'll see!

A giant sigh of relief from the Blues was cut short as a United long ball down the centre was nodded right by Moody, just inside his own half, to Mackay, without spotting Scott (?), who raced through but was blocked wonderfully by the outrushing Craigie. Moments later, however, a corner on Carloway's right was not cleared properly, broke centrally to Liam Coleman 20 metres out, and he thrashed a glorious right-foot shot high in to the net.

Again, Carloway pushed forward furiously: in quick succession, two tempting Tago crosses were headed over by Gochan and a Crossley shot blocked brilliantly by the keeper, but, once again, the Wasps broke suddenly, through the middle, and Keenan ghosted between Mackay and Moody to slam the ball perfectly past the advancing keeper to his right.

Sqwegg immediately responded, with a curious goal: receiving the ball on the right about 22 metres from goal, he turned inside and as the ball bounced up, he toe-ended it high with his right foot past a surprised Macleod to his right. Gochan then miscued from a Moody cross before a United attack on the left led to a flick across hitting Mackay's arm. A weak award but Keenan did not care and converted confidently low to Craigie's right.

Any half-time tactical rethink by Carloway was instantly rendered void by a long ball finding Scott Munro running free on the left; Craigie opted for a doomed Almunia run, then saw the ball whizz accurately over his head from the left edge of the box into his net. Next, Chancy took exception to some advice from Gochan, who then offered some more, and was advised in turn to spend the rest of the evening relaxing in the visitors' dressing room.

On 56 minutes a Sqwegg free-kick was tipped on to the bar. Then an eight-minute spell followed in which Kevin Smith might have had a hat-trick: first, he shot over, well-placed, before the ball came out to him, on the right edge of the box, after a corner on the left. He turned in square, then sent a neat shot through a ruck of players past an unsighted Craigie, but off his right-hand post. Next, he was released through the middle but Mackay somehow managed to track him into the box and prevent him finishing.

Suddenly, Carloway received a penalty, even softer than United's: the

slightest of pushes on Macdonald's back as the ball came in from the right. The "victim", himself, emulated Keenan's earlier conversion. However, right away, the lead was restored: a disputed Moody foul, centrally, on the 18-metre line, led to the sweetest of free-kicks from Keenan over the right side of the wall, just inside Craigie's left-hand post.

It was now 'Roy of the Rovers' stuff: two sides apparently unmindful of defensive obligations and simply determined to score as many goals as possible. On 78 minutes, Kevin Anderson was not closed down on the left bye-line and crossed low for Macdonald to crash high into the net from 8 metres, but the Stornoway side broke soon after and Craigie, now Carloway's main, and at times only, defender, was called upon to block brilliantly from Smith, one-on-one, before Pongo sent the ball on to the top of the bar at the other end. However, na Gormaich's misery was not yet complete: once more, United broke into Carloway's half, relatively unchallenged, and Scott Nicolson converted easily to Craigie's left. Then, deep in injury-time, a long diagonal from the halfway line was spilled by Craigie and the floating Keenan managed to squeeze it home, lowdown at the near post.

If Cecil B. de Mille was still around, this game - and its aftermath - would provide enough material for his next blockbuster. Who would play the Charlton Heston role, though? What is it politicians say after a catastrophé? Lessons will be learned? What might these lessons be, applied to Carloway? Perhaps that every side requires equal respect, not just the Lochs and Backs of this world. Because Daniel Keenan's name is not Lava or Scott Maciver, it doesn't make him any less dangerous or less worthy of careful policing; or Liam Coleman any less creative because he's not called Andy Murray or David Macmillan.

United played to their strengths here, and even though they were frequently as inept as the Blues at the back, they revelled in the freedom they received in midfield and attack, wasting no time on embellishments and dispatching it forward tout de suite. Their final score-line could have been stratospheric; indeed, the overall match score could have been a record-breaker.

For the Blues, once again, personnel was not the problem, more the tactical approach. Certainly Kenny Beag was missed and individual mistakes contributed to this nightmare, but eight goals aren't lost because of one player's mistake. Anyway, many goals are the result of strategic naïvete. Most of these certainly were. Nevertheless, problems, in every aspect of life, can be solved, using calm, perceptive reflection. And after all, football is one of the simpler aspects of life. Hopefully - or maybe it's too much to hope - this was a one-off.

United Man of the Match: Daniel Keenan (who else?).
Carloway Man of the Match: Dan Crossley.