

Lewis and Harris League:

Carloway 6 (3) Athletic 1 (0)

Kevin 'Gochan' Macleod 4 Craig Maciver 68

Calum Moody 16

Dan Crossley 27, 63, 80

Gordon 'Tago' Macdonald 59

At Cnoc a'Choilich.

30.8.10

Ref.: Murdo Macaulay

Gordon Craigie

Calum Moody Andrew Maciver (capt.) Domhnall Mackay

Kevin 'Gochan' Macleod Dan Crossley Kenny 'Beag' MacIennan Donnie Macphail

Gordon 'Tago' Macdonald

Seumas Macleod Archie Macdonald

Subs.used: Andrew V.P. Macleod (Andrew Maciver) 55; Kevin Anderson (Kevin Macleod) 82.

Aths, perhaps, would not have been the visitors of choice tonight, as remembrance of being ground to powder by the same side just 24 days ago in the Lewis Cup at the same venue still burned brightly. Added to this, of course, was the prospect of a final League game at Leurbost on Wednesday, the most difficult fixture in any Island team's fixture list, and spirits might not have been expected to be high down Carloway way.

The Blues knew they must not lose, in order to retain fourth place. However, God certainly operates in ways mysterious to mankind: the champagne was passed round na Gormaich's dressing-room BEFORE the game, not after, when it was discovered that Athletics' Fantastic Four would not feature: no Gus Maciver or Ali Walker (injured); Scott Maciver (not selected); no Mojo (not even present). What on earth happened in the Lewis Cup Final last Friday? Peter Dokus rang the changes: a 3-5-2 formation superseded the 4-4-2 of the United game, with Andrew V.P. Macleod dropping to the bench; Murdo "Sqwegg" Macleod was added to the injured list but Kenny "Beag" MacIennan was available and slotted in comfortably to central midfield, with Kevin "Gochan" Macleod and Gordon "Tago" Macdonald patrolling right and left. Archie Macdonald started, but the constant movement of Seumas Macleod and Dan Crossley made it difficult at times to decide who was his primary partner up front and who was in midfield.

A weakened Aths' side soon found it hard to contain an aggressive Carloway, who stormed forward as if they had something to prove. The first concerted move brought the opener: a Tago throw-in on the left, midway within the opposing half, found Mackay charging forward; he chipped the ball towards the front of the box where Crossley shielded the ball superbly from his markers, and allowed it to run through to the unmarked Gochan on the right, 8 metres out. Without fuss, he slid it home with his right foot past the helpless Maciver. Craigie then had to move smartly to touch away a dangerous cross, under pressure on his goal-line, for Pongo to head clear, before, first, Macleod fired over from 20 metres, then Macdonald hooked over inside the box, after a Moody free-kick was half-cleared to him.

A vicious Aths' free-kick, 25 metres out on the left, was swept in low behind

the defence, and Craigie somehow managed to block a low point-blank headflick directly in front of him on the 6-metre line, then reacted marvellously to block from the rebound. Within minutes, the men from Stornoway regretted their profligacy, as Moody rose high at the back post to head high inside Maciver's right-hand post off a Tago corner on the right. Despite competing hard, Athletic were losing shape, as na Gormaich gained a fluency, and when Crossley headed home another Tago corner on 27 minutes, they began to wobble dangerously. Immediately, a through ball released Gochan and Macdonald running in on goal, behind the defence; Gochan drew the keeper, 10 metres out, then squared to Archie Uibhisteach directly in front of goal, who stabbed it "home" - only for an Aths' defender to appear from nowhere and heft it away for a corner. Maciver then had to rush from his goal to fist away a penetrating Gochan cross from the right, before a glorious Macphail defence-ripper allowed a classic Tago strike from 22 metres, which was punched away for yet another corner.

An initial flurry from Aths saw a quick break on the left and cross, which was flicked in neatly at the near post from 8 metres, but Craigie was alert to smother low to his right; another cross from the left was headed wide by Robert Jones from 16 metres. However, Athletic were still unable to contain Carlaway at the back, as Gochan and Tago spread them wide; Macleod, Macdonald, and Crossley ran and chased tirelessly; Kenny Beag held the centre, and Donnie Macphail played the killer ball. Also, they seemed unable to deal with Tago's and Macphail's corners: on 54 minutes, another Tago corner on the right by Pongo was headflicked back on the near edge of the box and ran along the crossbar.

Four minutes later, the game was effectively over when Macdonald, tackled hard on the right edge of the box, blocked an attempted clearance, dug in again to block, then squeezed the ball left to Tago, whose left-footer from 10 metres took a slight deflection to completely fool the keeper and creep home low to his left. On 63 minutes yet another Tago corner was met, 8 metres out, this time by Crossley, and he screwed his header exquisitely, diagonally backwards into the roof of the net. Macleod shot past from 8 metres, before Aths clawed one back: a Mackay clearance was blocked on the left, then two tackles evaded, before a low cross almost from the goal-line was met by Craig Maciver, all alone in the goalmouth. Craigie then had to rush from goal to boot clear from an onrushing Jones, before a clever Crossley flick-and-turn left his marker dead; he raced in, drew the keeper, but somehow managed to stroke the ball just outside Maciver's right-hand post from 16 metres. However, four minutes later he redeemed himself, converting a Donnie Macphail corner from the left. The final action was a last-minute Dougie Maciver run and shot which glanced off Craigie's post from 25 metres.

In a sense, this game was a form of exorcism for the Blues, an attempt to kill off the demons from the United debacle, an announcement to the rest of Lewis that they are far, far better than that score-line might have suggested. Of course, a severely weakened Athletic made this task that bit easier, for though they ran and competed hard, and were eager to get forward, they lacked weight at the back and danger in attack - for obvious reasons. Kenny Beag's presence was an immediate bonus for the Blues, as he switched effortlessly between his Makalele and Sneijder roles, totally occupying the

centre, which was a black hole against the Wasps. This served as a bulwark against opposition surges through the centre, giving defenders time, and allowed Donnie Macphail to get creative. Gochan and Tago could stay wide, in turn creating space in the middle for eternal movers like Macdonald, Crossley, and Macleod, the continual position-shifting of the latter two further confusing the opposing markers, and providing further illustration of Dan Crossley's development into a first-class striker.

Athletic Man of the Match: Mark "Dougie" Maciver.

Carloway Man of the Match: Dan Crossley.