

Lewis & Harris League

Carloway 2 (2) United 0 (0)

Billy Anderson 3

Archie Macdonald 17

At Cnoc a' Choilich.

Friday, 8.4.10

Ref.: Billy Macdonald

Gordon Craigie

Andrew "Tago" Maciver Calum Tom Moody Domhnall Mackay Donald "D.I." MacIennan

Darren Mackinnon Kenny "Beag" MacIennan Murdo "Squeg" Macleod (capt.) Gordon "Tago" Macdonald

Archie Macdonald Billy Anderson

Subs.: Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald (Billy Anderson) 58; Dan Crossley (Archie Macdonald) 65; Seumas Macleod (Kenny MacIennan) 79

With the phony war of trial permutations, friendlies, and predictions over, Carloway and United got down to the only business that really matters in football - slugging it out for 90 minutes on a pitch. On an unexpectedly pleasant, windless evening, the Blues' starting XI had a familiar, if 4-4-2, look, though two returnees did line up: Billy Anderson (after a season at Col Uarach) up front to partner Archie Macdonald, and Darren Mackinnon (returned from Ireland) as a wide wing-back on the right. D.I. MacIennan filled left-back but Calum Moody moved left to become joint main stopper alongside Domhnall Mackay, and Andrew Tago became right-back. Squeg captained, and a strong bench included Kenny Dokus, Seumas Macleod, Dan Crossley, and Donnie Macphail.

The astonishing advances made by Carloway in Season 2009 seem to have placed an unwarranted burden on the side, with constant references to them as if they were and are *"a chosen generation --- called --- out of darkness into --- marvellous light"*, so that, for some mysterious reason, Season 2010 is now perceived as a failure; the Gazette's comments and forecasts have increased this perception of unrealised potential ready to blossom, and no doubt will inspire the Bacachs and Siarachs (and others) to confound this depiction of the Blues. However, there was no immediate sign in the ranks of any anxiety as Billy Macdonald signalled the opening of Season 2011 and let slip the dogs of war.

After an initial Wasps' flurry, it was first blood to na Gormaich: Mackinnon was brought down midway into United's half, wide on the right, and Gordon Tago swung in a vicious left-foot free-kick which Pongo tried to scissor-kick backwards from the edge of the box. The ball broke inwards through a static defence to Anderson 8 metres out, rightish, and he turned and swept it past the outrushing Calum Macleod before he could block.

Before Carloway could congratulate themselves, however, United should really have equalised, in similar circumstances: a dead ball in was half-cleared forward, then fired back in from a central position 22 metres out; it seemed to run right through the defence to Scott Munro(?) 8 metres out, on the left, but Craigie was out like a flash to block brilliantly when he really should have had no chance. This unsettled United

and for a period the Blues were rampant: on 10 minutes a flowing move down the left from D.I. to Tago to Archie Macdonald, allowed the striker to nod on backwards and inwards for Billy Anderson to ghost in front of a defender to flick just over from 16 metres. Moments later, Calum Moody nodded a Tago corner from the right, just over from the 6-metre line; but two minutes later, it was 2: a glorious Mackinnon through ball, a la Michael Carrick, from deep in Carloway's half, on the right, just cleared the heads of the United stoppers, for the Uibhisteach to pip the keeper by a half-metre to it, nod past him, and convert, despite a desperate saving tackle from Sandy Morrison.

On the half-hour, United finally forced themselves back into the game, as Tom Lawrence (with Liam Coleman, probably their most effective first-half performers) beat two men beautifully on the right, cut in, and tried to place his shot just inside Craigie's right-hand post, but lacked power. Then, as Carloway pressed, a high ball out of defence on 43 minutes cleared the Carloway defence, but a lack of control on the run-in allowed the ball to spin forward and the ever-alert Craigie smothered it competently.

The second half was a much more even affair, with na Gormaich having more of the chances, but continually troubled by the pace and movement of what looked like a younger squad, which, thankfully for the Blues, seemed unable to create clear goal-scoring opportunities. Mackinnon's speed off the mark, in turn, continued to expose United's left flank and the introduction of Dokus to replace Billy Anderson on the hour stretched the middle. Immediately a grafting Kenny Beag played Dokus through the middle but a superlative Macleod diving save, low to his right, thwarted him. Then on 71 minutes, Dokus slipped his marker on the left, advanced, and from 16 metres placed his shot round the keeper, but it struck Macleod's left-hand post, and was cleared.

Eventually United were to have a chance to salvage a result. Increasingly they were making headway down their left, and one such foray, 6 minutes later, left Jason Maclean clear on Craigie, 8 metres out centrally, but again Craigie capitalised on hesitancy, and made himself big to miraculously deny his work-mate. When Craigie saved at full stretch to his left, from 20 metres, a few minutes later, it was the Wasps' last real chance, though the Blues were to have a few.

On 81 minutes a crunching Pongo tackle on the halfway line allowed him to find a breaking Dokus escaping down the right. His run and sweeping cross cleared the defence to an inrushing Tago on the left, but his attempted Rooney-style left-foot overhead shot was too ambitious and flew past harmlessly. Maybe just as well; if he had connected, the ball would probably have gone through Cal - and the net! Next, the keeper blocked a low cross from the right, then reacted splendidly to drop on the rebound under pressure, before another Tago attempt was kicked away close to the line. In the last few minutes Calum Moody was to have another two attempts to head home Sqweg corners from the left, but the first, on 83 minutes, just cleared the bar, and deep in injury-time, the second slipped past the post.

Carloway edged a deserved victory, mainly on the strength of the opening half-hour performance, and a greater ability to create scoring opportunities throughout, due to good play from Darren Mackinnon, Gordon Tago, and the speed of Archie

Macdonald and Kenny Dokus. United ran and ran, and cannot be faulted on effort, commitment, and competitiveness; but they suffered from an affliction which cursed the Blues themselves later in Season 2010, especially in the Coop Cup Final: an inability to create - and take - chances. Imaginative play did provide Carlaway with several chances to bury the Stornoway team but these were not taken, which brings next Friday vividly into one's mind. Against the champions, you usually only get a half a dozen chances; a team must take at least a couple. On the plus side, Carlaway's defence performed creditably, with Calum Moody and Domhnall Mackay towers of strength at the back, careful on the ball, and the former, especially, eager to come forward. D.I. didn't put a foot wrong either, so this might account for United's problems up front, and a repeat of this display is necessary versus Lochs.

United Man of the Match: Calum "Cal" Macleod.

Carlaway Man of the Match: Calum "Tom" Moody.