

Lewis & Harris League:

## **Back 7 (2) Carloway 2 (2)**

Andrew Maciver 30      Gordon "Tago" Macdonald 13  
Murray Macleod 41      Kevin "Gochan" Macleod 34  
Kevin "Bloxy" Murray 51  
Fraser Macleod 74, 75, 79, 82

At Col Uarach,  
Monday, 6.6.11  
Ref.: George Macaskill

Gordon Craigie

Darren Mackinnon   Calum Tom Moody   Domhnall Mackay   Donald "D.I." MacIennan  
Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald   Seumas Macleod   Dan Crossley   Murdo "Squeg" Macleod (capt.)  
Gordon "Tago" Macdonald

Kevin "Gochan" Macleod

Subs.: Andrew "Tago" Maciver (Darren Mackinnon) 46; Donnie Macphail (Calum "Tom" Moody) 75;  
Archie Macdonald (Kevin "Gochan" Macleod) 75.

One dictionary definition of the word "nightmare" is "a very unpleasant experience, as in, for example, an astronaut's worst nightmare is becoming detached during extra-vehicular activity". Another example could be, "Carloway fans' worst nightmare is experiencing their team's defence disintegrate before them in the last twenty minutes of an important game; usually, at least, once a season. Col Uarach, Goathill, and Sgoil nan Loch are favoured venues for these occurrences". This clash had been variously billed as the latest in a series of decisive League encounters between well-matched and talented sides - and rightly so: the two leaders, separated by a point, vying for pole position as the League season neared the halfway stage. And for 74 minutes, it seemed just that. What happened in the next 16, however, is best erased from the Blues' archives. In a 9-team league with what seems at present three realistic contenders - Back, Carloway, and Lochs - and another two dark horses waiting in the wings - West Side and Athletic - to come through on the inside if each inflicts serious damage on the others, any pretender to the title can only afford to lose a single game, at most two.

This no doubt weighed heavily in the thoughts of Kevin Anderson and Iain MacIennan going into this confrontation. So Carloway opted to continue with Saturday's successful 4-5-1 formation, so effective in nullifying the Leurbost threat. However, the HAC goal hero, Andrew "Tago" Maciver, was forced to drop to the bench, alongside David Beaton, Donnie Macphail, Archie Macdonald, and Calum Macleod, as he was experiencing a slight abdominal muscle strain; this allowed returnee, Domhnall Mackay, to resume his usual role in central defence, alongside Calum Tom Moody. For Back, Ross Hall appeared in central midfield, in front of Jason Macleod and David "Ox" Macleod, flanked by D.J. Macdonald and Murdo MacIennan, while Kevin "Bloxy" Murray began up front with a roving remit, alongside another *bête noir* of the Blues, speed merchant and deadly finisher, Fraser Macleod, scorer of the 96th minute winner (!!!) in last season's encounter at Col Uarach.

The initial exchanges were less than encouraging for na Gormaich: Back's initial aim, using Ross Hall and Martin Maclean, to confront, and block, Carloway's flooded midfield was, more or less, coping, stalling the combative Seumas Macleod and Dan

Crossley, forcing them and "Squeg" wide to attack and isolating "Gochan", while Carloway's back-line relentlessly pushed high to impel the forces forward; a high-risk strategy faced with two elusive, nomadic strikers, in "Bloxy": a first-rate shielder, layer-off, and chance-snatcher; and Fraser Macleod, off his mark faster than the proverbial speeding bullet. The fast breaking of Andrew Maciver and Murray Macleod on either flank pulled the back four wide, and this allowed Back's fluid forward system to create and exploit space for diagonally-running hit-men to run between and behind defenders.

Within nine minutes Back might have surged ahead: a brisk ball from defence found "Bloxy" on the left, just inside the Carloway half, and his immediate lofted pass cleared the retreating defence for Fraser Macleod and Maciver homing in on Craigie unchallenged. However, Macleod's attempted lob from 22 metres was totally miscued and the ball spun sharply away to the right, where Maciver performed a wonderful retrieval on the goal-line to cross square and hard, but a hastily-returning Macleod blocked at the near post and cleared. Moments later, Fraser Macleod found himself clear on the right; Murray Macleod, 16 metres out in front of goal, was given time to control his low cross, spin and shoot, but his left-foot shot slipped just outside Craigie's right-hand post.

On 9 minutes it was "Bloxy's" turn to be sent clear, just right of centre, but as he sped into the box, Mackinnon recovered brilliantly to force him off the ball, and sweep the ball away to the right. The ball was moved on swiftly to "Dokus", breaking on the right, but Seumas Macleod was unable to get enough weight on his low cross. However, on 13 minutes a rash trip by Hall on Macleod, on the right edge of the box, gave "Tago" the opportunity to send the sweetest of left-foot lob-shots just inside "Tohan's" left-hand post. Battle was now truly joined: on 17 minutes "Bloxy" nodded a corner from the right into the side-net at the far post, before Martin Maclean drove just over from 23 metres. A minute later a penetrating diagonal from Mackinnon, deep on the right, midway within the Back half, was met at the far post by "Tago", but his spectacular volley screamed over and wide. On the half-hour Back finally levelled: an attack on the left saw "Bloxy" feed Maciver coming through the centre; he moved it on swiftly to Fraser Macleod, kept moving, and Macleod slid the return inside Macleod to the onrushing attacker to slip under Craigie from 12 metres.

Carloway responded quickly: a forward Macleod pass found "Gochan" breaking off centre to the right; he doubled back from Jason Macleod, cut inside, and his sudden right-foot stab from 18 metres took a wicked deflection off "Ox" to deceive "Tohan" low to his left. A minute later the Blues had a golden chance to distance themselves further from their opponents, when Macleod made space for himself on the left and set up "Sqweg", coming in unmarked in the centre, but his snatched shot under pressure sliced high and wide to the right from 22 metres.

On 41 minutes na Gormaich were left to rue their profligacy as, directly after a "Bloxy" attempt from 20 metres was blocked, then dropped on, by Craigie, a break on the left of centre ended with "Bloxy" slide-ruling the ball behind the line to Murray Macleod coming in from the left to slip under the advancing Craigie from 10 metres.

The second half opened dramatically, with Murray Macleod sent behind Mackinnon

by "Bloxy" on the left immediately. He forced his way into the box, but pulled his shot past Craigie's left-hand post from 16 metres. Five minutes later, a sweeping move saw Hall find Macdonald who released Fraser Macleod down the right and his screaming daisycutter from 23 metres could only be pushed away by Craigie to his right, directly into the path of the unmarked "Bloxy" following up to convert.

"Pongo" straightaway replaced the unwell Mackinnon at right wing-back and for the next twelve minutes Carloway threw everything at the Bacachs, in a desperate attempt to salvage a result they, at one point, seemed likely to edge. On 53 minutes a "Squeg" corner from the right was headed over by Moody, before "Dokus" saw a drive charged down in the box, after "Pongo" forced his way down the right to cross. Two minutes later a deep "D.I." cross from the left was glanced past by "Dokus". Then "Pongo" headed forward forcefully to Crossley, who shrugged off a couple of tackles to charge through the middle and send a drive whacking off the top right of "Tohan's" crossbar and over. Sustained pressure led to Mackay bursting forward to feed Macleod, 20 metres out on the left, but his shot flew past. Next, the same player sent in a vicious free-kick from the left, which took the slightest of touches as it flew across goal; Moody nodded the resulting corner over.

A minute later, however, the wheel started to turn, as the two Macleods and "Bloxy" began to give the Blues several nasty reminders, in the course of the next 25 minutes, that they were still on the field, and largely neglected by the Carloway defence, now primarily operating as a supportive midfield. Fraser Macleod suddenly came to life, breaking fast off Mackay and behind Maclennan down the right, to cut the ball fast across the Blues' goal-line from the right goal-line but too briskly for his name-sake to connect at the far post. On 66 minutes, an amazing let-off for Na Gormaich: yet again, Murray Macleod was clear on the left but Craigie was out to block miraculously. The ball spun loose and out, then was lobbed over him, only for a back-rushing Mackay to head the ball clear off the line.

Finally, the simplest of goals killed the contest: a corner on the left was met centrally, 8 metres out, by Fraser Macleod, who nodded home, inside the near post. Carloway had barely re-grouped when Macleod was behind Moody to race through the centre, check, then chip the approaching Craigie from the edge of the box. Na Gormaich redoubled their efforts to pull something back in a game which now seemed beyond them, without apparently troubling to bolt the cellar door first. And so it was, in the 79th minute, a Macleod corner from the right this time was met directly in front of goal, 10 metres out, by the tallest man on the park, unmarked, to head home forcefully. Three minutes later, the same player was sprinting clear through the middle to round Craigie and tap home.

This was very much a "*Behold, a pale horse*", experience for Carloway. They slugged it out valiantly for 74 minutes with Back, riding their luck frequently at the back, a little unlucky up front; Seumas Macleod and Dan Crossley, especially, took the battle bravely to Ross Hall and Martin Maclean, with "Tago" outstanding early on on the left; then the wheels came off - and how!

The Blues seem, at times, to approach matches with the same attitude as Brazil had up until the 70s: "*It doesn't matter how many the opposition score; we know we'll score more!*" Carloway's preferred *modus operandi* is to play to their strengths,

rather than worry about the strengths of their opponents, and play like Mowbray's W.B.A. or Holloway's Blackpool: attractive play from the back, the build-up, the incisive pass, a strike. They do not like to stay back, to mark, to defend. A square defence pushes high in support, seeing no need for a sweeper or fronting holding midfielder, although "Squeg" occasionally drops into the latter role.

However, quality opposition tends, of course, to have quality players who must be respected, like Fraser Macleod, "Bloxy", Scott Maciver, D.J. Clinton, and so on. How do you deal with them? Players who are adept at drifting wide of markers, then taking off to latch on to the expected lifted pass over the heads of defenders, or the killer diagonal between the back-men for them to run in on Craigie or Beaton? That's when the frantic chase back ensues, and the later it occurs in any given game, the more tired defensive legs are likely to be. However, Carloway seemed able to adopt this style easily enough against Lochs in the HAC, but against Back or Athletic, or even West Side, all-out assault seems the preferred option. Yet, on their day, these sides are every bit as troublesome as the champions, and, as on Monday, their finishing can be devastating.

Back Man of the Match: Fraser Macleod.

Carloway Man of the Match: Seumas Macleod.