

Lewis & Harris League:

Carloway 5 (3) Ness 1 (1)

Murdo "Squeg" Macleod 3 Neil Morrison 18

Donnie Macphail 30

Calum Tom Moody 41

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald 76

Gordon "Tago" Macdonald 82

At Cnoc a' Choilich.

Monday, 20.6.11

Ref.: D.J. Maclean

Gordon Craigie

Darren Mackinnon Calum Tom Moody Seumas Macleod Donald "D.I." MacIennan

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Dan Crossley Donnie Macphail Murdo "Squeg" Macleod

(capt.) Gordon "Tago" Macdonald

Billy Anderson

Subs.: Archie Macdonald (Billy Anderson) 46; Kevin "Barra" Macneil (Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald) 78; Calum Macleod (Murdo "Squeg" Macleod) 78.

After cider and Budweiser celebrating glorious, and well-deserved, triumph in the Black Isle, it was very much a return to bread and butter in the L. & H. League, as Carloway sought essential victory over the Niseachs to prevent light appearing between leaders, Back, and a chasing pack of the Blues, West Side, and Lochs. To challenge seriously for any title, defeat at venues like Col Uarach can only be countenanced if victories over less successful sides are delivered. Yet, the mantra, "*Carloway haven't lost to Ness since ...*" is becoming a tiresome yoke on the shoulders of both these clubs, with Ness, no doubt, hoping, "*Surely this will be the night,*" and the Blues opining, "*Well, it has to happen sooner or later, but not this season, please!*" Changes were forced on the Blues: Kevin "Gochan" Macleod, substituted after 10 minutes in Fortrose after a serious facial injury, was unfit; Kenny "Beag" MacIennan was unavailable; while Domhnall Mackay and Andrew "Tago" Maciver, the latter an inspirational figure in the HAC versus Castletown, both had work commitments in the southern isles. Seumas Macleod, an occasional, and highly successful, performer in central defence, returned to partner Saturday's Man of the Match, Calum Tom Moody, at the back, while Billy Anderson adopted the main striking role.

Carloway threatened immediately. In 2 minutes "Dokus" was sent clear down the right and his sharp, low cross was met by an unmarked Anderson, 10 metres out in front of goal, but his strike was not clean and the keeper blocked well, low to his left; "Tago" followed up, but the ball was scrambled away for a corner. "Tago's" corner from the right flew across goal, to be reverse-headed at the far post by Moody, back across to Crossley, who squared for "Squeg", 14 metres out in the centre, to send a low, right-foot drive, via Seumas Macleod's boot, just inside Sweeney's right-hand post. Ness reacted strongly to this stunner, with a determined "Cheocaidh" and Angie Campbell aware they must not surrender the midfield initiative to "Squeg", Crossley, and Macphail, and in turn must keep supply lines open to their two extremely troublesome front-runners in Andrew Macleod and Sam

MacSween, whom the Carloway back-line were finding difficult to close down. However, opportunity continued to favour na Gormaich: in 16 minutes a trademark Mackinnon cross led to a blocked shot coming back to Anderson 20 metres out, centrally, but his right-foot drive was turned away expertly for a corner by Sweeney.

A minute later "Dokus" fed "Tago" peeling off behind his marker into the box, only for him to be tripped from behind by "Cheocaidh". No doubt about the foul, but was it inside the box? Hm The ball went on a Gary McAllister roll as Calum Tom ran up to convert, and this might have disconcerted him into sending his right-foot screamer a foot outside the base of Sweeney's right-hand post. Immediately, there was payback as Sam MacSween burst loose on the right behind MacLennan, charged to the bye-line, and his sharp cut-back found Neil Morrison coming in to the near corner of the box to send a low drive through Moody's legs, to the right of the unsuspecting Craigie.

For 10 minutes the Blues lost their way as Ness moved up a gear in midfield, but, except for a superb Macleod saving tackle 16 metres out on a Ness front man surging through in 25 minutes, it remained the Blues creating the chances. On 26 minutes "D.I." sent "Tago" clear on the left; he got behind his marker, then cut in, but his lob-shot from 18 metres, from a difficult angle, cleared the bar. A minute later he stabbed the ball over from 16 metres, before "Dokus" won the ball, advanced and shot, but, once again, Sweeney reacted brilliantly to flick his shot from 16 metres wide and high. On the half-hour the pressure finally told: Crossley forced his way brusquely down the left and his sharp low cross was swung at and missed by Anderson, broke to Calum Tom, who then slipped it square to Macphail, and na Gormaich's own Xavi slotted the ball well wide to the right of a helpless "Sweeney" from 12 metres.

On 36 minutes, Andrew Macleod metamorphosed into Garrincha on the left, twisting and turning like Wiltord to beat man after man into the Blues' box, doubled back, then disappointed with a low shot into the arms of Craigie from the left edge of the box. However, Sweeney was soon on double-time once more: a through high ball saw Billy Anderson racing behind the defence but the keeper anticipated his attempted lob from 22 metres and retreated to hold. Then a Crossley head-on enabled "Squeg" to bring out another tremendous stop by Sweeney from a 22 metre drive. However, in the 41st minute he was powerless when Calum Moody met a "Tago" corner from the left to send a looping header over him and just under the bar from 12 metres.

It's difficult to suggest what words of inspiration Steven Macritchie and Chris Macdonald might have used at the break to psyche up the Niseachs, as Carloway had gradually established a blanket control of the middle of the park, "Dokus" and "Tago" had remained wide, and were repeatedly picked out by searching diagonals from Macphail and "Squeg" and stretched the back-line thin regularly, while the pace and presence of Crossley through the middle or on the left presented an alternative problem. Ness desperately needed an early goal, but were unable to get forward in numbers. Immediately, a towering Craigie clearance was brought down expertly by

Crossley in the centre circle, then flicked on *tout de suite* to "Tago" advancing on goal, but the ball spun away awkwardly from him. Then a careless pass-back led to a wrestling match in the box between Archie Macdonald and "Sweeney" which the keeper ultimately won at the third attempt.

The half-chances continued: on 54 minutes Archie "Uibhisteach" sent a beautiful curving shot from the right edge of the box round a stranded "Sweeney", to thud against the inside of the far post and clear, before another "Tago" run led to a blocked shot on the left, from 20 metres. A minute later a diagonal to the left sent the same player off on a run but his low cross went whizzing across the Ness 6-metre line, just out of reach of Macdonald and "Dokus". It was the 66th minute before Ness's first serious chance materialised when a neat interpassing move on the left freed Angie Campbell behind Mackinnon; he advanced dangerously on the left but his attempted cross from 20 metres to pick out central support was sliced past. In 72 minutes "Sweeney" did well to block with his right foot another Macdonald shot from 16 metres, before having to scramble, and save at the second attempt, a hot potato by "Squeg" from 23 metres.

In 76 minutes the inevitable occurred: a Macphail corner on the left pinpointed "Dokus" hovering on the right-hand edge of the box; he met the ball on the volley to send a raging daisycutter through the massed defence and curving into the far side of the net. Goal of the Season? Where is POD when you need him? Just after a snap shot in 82 minutes from Macphail crept past from 14 metres, it was 5: a Ness attack broke down on their left and Mackinnon came roaring through on the right to send one of his devastating Frank de Boer forward diagonals high in to "Tago" racing through the centre and from the edge of the box he sent a perfect lob-shot shoulder-high past "Sweeney" to his left. The game was over but a final flurry from Ness down the left led to a corner whizzing high over the defence to the right where an unmarked Andrew Macleod somehow managed to lift the ball over the bar from 8 metres.

The Blues can be well-satisfied with tonight's performance as no one was posted missing whenever the ball came into their air. Professionals always say that it can be difficult to keep the adrenalin level high at home, against teams and players you are familiar with, after the heady atmosphere of European ties in exotic locations. Another danger is a potential lack of respect, where you may be misled into thinking a team you know well, and have beaten regularly in the past, may somehow be less formidable than strangers in the HAC. Fortunately, Carloway treated Ness as major trouble, as if it was a League decider (perhaps, they all are in a 9-team league), and, apart from a slight wobble after Neil Morrison equalised, controlled the game throughout against dogged and combative opposition, who, however, faded alarmingly throughout the second half.

The key, as it so often is, was the midfield; "Squeg", Dan Crossley, and Donnie Macphail remained focussed throughout, with the strong force of Calum Tom Moody regularly leaving a dependable Seumas Macleod to mind the shop and join them. "Cheocaidh" and Campbell were outnumbered and

overworked, and with "Tago" and "Dokus" playing wide, it meant that Macritchie was frequently left alone to deal with Billy Anderson, then Archie Macdonald, and later, Kevin "Barra", as his support was drawn wide to mark and cover. In turn, dangerous forwards like Andrew Macleod and Sam Macsween lacked ammunition, and "D.I." and Darren Mackinnon were more often wing-backs than backs, and this allowed the latter to deliver several of those fantastic de Boer cross-balls which have become his trademark.

Ness Man of the Match: Andrew Macleod.

Carlaway Man of the Match: Dan Crossley.