

Lewis & Harris League:

## United 0 (0) Carloway 2 (1)

*Dan Crossley 18*

*Archie Macdonald 83*

*At Goathill Park.*

*Wednesday, 6.7.11*

*Ref.: George Macaskill.*

*Gordon Craigie*

*Darren Mackinnon Domhnall Mackay Calum Tom Moody Donald "D.I." MacIennan*

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

*(capt.) Gordon "Tago" Macdonald*

*Archie Macdonald*

*Sub.: Kevin "Barra" Macneil (Dan Crossley) 83.*

The week, so far, was not witnessing the most ideal of preparations for an important HAC Quarter-Final at Maryburgh against a quality side like Kirkwall Rovers, what with a titanic, but energy-sapping, extra-time victory (though cruel elimination on penalties) at Barvas in the EaF, leading two nights later into this tricky League fixture against United at one of Carloway's least favoured grounds. Defeat was not an option if the Blues were to remain at the head of the chasing pack behind leaders, Back, who themselves faced an uncomfortable confrontation with Lochs, down at Leurbost. The champions, of course, were in a similar position to na Gormaich, desperate for victory to stay in touch with the Bacachs.

An insidious arrogance can lead form teams to treat sides like United, Ness, and so on with less respect than clubs like Back, Lochs, West Side, etc. because of their League placing. However, memories of events at Goathill on a damp evening last August against the Wasps, no doubt, still cause many of the Carloway players (and supporters!) to wake up in the middle of the night in cold sweats and hence act as powerful antidotes to such presumptions.

There were continuing selection problems for the Blues: work commitments still ruled out Andrew "Tago" Maciver and Seumas Macleod, while Kenny "Beag" MacIennan still had a nagging ankle injury and Kevin "Gochan" Macleod awaited treatment for a broken nose. The call came for Archie "Uibhisteach" Macdonald to lead the line, not the most enviable of tasks against Tom Lawrence, while new signing, Seumas Macdonald (from Dun), joined Kevin Anderson, Kevin "Barra" Macneil, and David Beaton on the bench. Former Blues' keeper (and Assistant Coach), Gordon "Gordy" Mackenzie, was between the sticks for what looked like a depleted United squad, with no Scott Morrison, Jason Maclean, or Daniel Keenan.

Lately, Carloway have spoiled their fans with regular explosive openings, leaving them unaware of what to expect in their trademark kick-off rushes. Unfortunately, the supporters experienced the opposite tonight, in a dull opening 15 minutes, where neither side could establish a rhythm or gain a grip on proceedings. Carloway had the edge on ball possession but neither side had a single chance until the 16th minute, when the Blues suddenly seemed to realise that goals don't score themselves and require passing, moves, breaks. "Squeg" received the ball centrally moving into the United half

and sent a slide-rule pass through to "Uibhisteach" racing into the box but his snap-shot was blocked, then spun away to the left where "Tago" sent a vicious low cross across goal, about 10 metres out. Macdonald and Mackenzie clashed for the ball and it flashed away for a corner on the right. "Tago" swung the ball in head-high and Calum Tom met it 16 metres out, but the lowish height and sideways angle were too difficult to connect with properly and his header shot well-wide on the right.

Moments later, another Carloway attack was half-cleared, and the ball was dispatched swiftly to Moody, still inside the United half, out on the left touch-line, and he sent a glorious diagonal over the advancing stoppers to a charging Dan Crossley, who brought the ball down beautifully, with a single touch, à la Berghof, looked up - no flag - and thwacked the ball low to the right of a helpless Mackenzie. Hardly had handshakes been exchanged when a beautiful ball out of defence caught their back-line stranded high, allowing a United striker (Scott Munro?) to ghost behind and in on Craigie. Fatally, he slowed on the edge of the box and a covering Mackinnon miraculously got a left foot in. The ball spun back and the striker sent a snap-shot to Craigie's right which he snatched at, lost, then clawed away, high to his right. A let-off! Carloway responded with a Crossley snap-shot which whizzed over the bar from 22 metres, then the same player found "Tago" on the left, who cut in past Liam Coleman and slipped the ball to "Dokus" but he was blocked, 16 metres out.

On 28 minutes, another heart-stopping moment for the Blues as Stuart Macdonald escaped free down the right, raced into the box and from 16 metres slipped the ball beautifully round Craigie, but just outside the far post. On 33 minutes "Gordie" was called on to make a great stop low from Macdonald, centrally, 20 metres out; then Macphail, moving into the opposition half on the right, picked out "Dokus" on the edge of the box, who then flicked the ball up and backwards over his marker, but just as he moved to strike, a blocking tackle came in. "Dokus" next released "Tago" on the left behind Coleman but his drive from 18 metres on the left edge of the box, was pawed away high by Mackenzie for a corner. Right on half-time came a stunning save from the United keeper. A Carloway break on the right allowed Mackinnon to get the better of Calum Campbell to send over a dangerous cross which Macdonald smacked with his head, on the 6-metre line, slightly to Mackenzie's right. "Gordie" instinctively shot out his right hand; the ball went up; he snatched at it, didn't quite get it, but as the ball bobbed above the goal-line, finally got hold of it at the second, maybe third, attempt. Next time, "Gordie" should try it with Indian Clubs!

The second period endured a similar flat opening to the first and the Blues started to drift ominously, seemingly unable to retain possession and establish any coherent fluidity. United gradually dominated possession but seemed unable to create and close on any significant chances, mainly because the best performing part of the Carloway machine, was the back-line of Darren Mackinnon, Domhnall Mackay, and Calum Tom, who repeatedly denied United any clear sight of goal within their territory which, in turn, necessitated long-range shooting, reminiscent of 50s/ 60s South Americans. The Blues' midfield lost its creative unity, as its main inspiration, Dan Crossley, tired and Donnie Macphail felt the effects of the injury he was

carrying from Monday's game; Archie was increasingly isolated.

On 52 minutes Stuart Macdonald broke on the right but his inviting cross was headed well wide from 18 metres. Then a neat inter-passing movement through the centre was side-footed past from 20 metres by Scott Munro. On 67 minutes a needless foul on the right edge of the box led to a wasted free-kick, wide and high past Craigie's left-hand post. A minute later, a pass from the right gave an unmarked Michael J. Maclean on the edge of the box what was to be the Wasps' best chance of the half, but his hurried right-foot clip curved away, just outside Craigie's right-hand post. With 20 minutes left, na Gormaich finally stirred into action through the middle, and this led to a free-kick which Calum Tom hit immediately from 22 metres, but it shot harmlessly past on the left.

The contest belatedly re-awakened in the final quarter-hour, as "Squeg", "Dokus", and "Tago" reasserted their presence. On 79 minutes "Dokus" was brought down 23 metres out centrally and Mackinnon sent an exquisite dipping drive over the wall to thud against Mackenzie's bar to his right, but the ball bounced straight down, was cleared and eventually found its way to Martainn Shields bursting clear on the left. He carried the ball into the Carloway box, then swept it around Craigie but pulled it just wide of the far post. Three minutes later the game was over: an inter-passing move on the left was cleared back out to "D.I." on the left, 22 metres from the bye-line, and his high looping cross found Macdonald running along the line of the defence to head home from 10 metres, despite a gallant effort by "Gordie" to save with his left hand, which only resulted in his pushing the ball into the inside netting.

Every game can't be expected to equal the tense excitement of Monday's EaF at Barvas. Arguably, Carloway were suffering from the exertions of that contest - a long energy-sapping evening, crushingly disappointing at its conclusion - as tonight, after a decent opening half, they sank without trace in the first half-hour of the second. This presented United with an excellent opportunity to punish the Blues, having themselves had to endure a frustrating first 45 minutes, where they were largely denied possession, hence were unable to get forward.

Only constant vigilance from Tom Lawrence, Liam Coleman, *et al* had kept them alive. However, lack of an ace finisher, like Daniel Keenan, meant the openings were frequently misused, and United were still not in the running by the time Carloway eventually gained a second wind. Not that the Blues were any more deadly in front of goal than the Wasps: the ratio of reasonable chances created to those actually taken was rather unattractive, so ultimate thanks for eventual victory here, and (crossed fingers!) on Saturday must rest, as it generally has throughout the season, with the Gneissian rocks at the back, Calum Tom Moody and Domhnall Mackay, with sterling support on the whole right-hand side of the field from Darren Mackinnon, and in front of them, Carloway's own non-stop fighting machine in midfield, Dan Crossley, a multi-talented holding/attacking midfielder, winger, and goalscorer.

**United** Man of the Match: Stuart Macdonald.

**Carloway** Man of the Match: Domhnall Mackay.

