

Lewis and Harris League:

**Lochs 0 (0) Carloway 2 (1)**

*Kevin "Gochan" Macleod 31  
Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald 77*

*Referee: Robert Mackay.*

*At Cameron Terrace.*

*Monday, 18.7.11*

*Gordon Craigie*

*Andrew "Tago" Maciver Domhnall Mackay Calum Tom Moody Darren Mackinnon  
Seumas Macleod Dan Crossley Murdo "Sqweq" Macleod (capt.) Gordon "Tago" Macdonald  
Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Kevin "Gochan" Macleod*

*Subs.: Archie Macdonald (Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald) 87; Calum Macleod (Kevin "Gochan" Macleod) 90+2.*

*Yellow Cards: Andrew "Tago" Maciver 57.*

A defining moment faced Carloway tonight as they, no doubt, reflected, "*On such a full sea are we now afloat, And we must take the current when it serves, Or lose our ventures,*" Were they to be, forever, a Dundee United, an Andy Murray, a Colin Montgomerie, always around, but never going to take that final step, and grasp the big one? Could they be a Lochs, a Novak Djokovic, a Darren Clarke? The calamity at Lionacleite was not, perhaps, the ideal preparation for tonight's collision at Leurbost, rightfully still considered one of the most feared venues to visit in the Highlands and islands, even allowing for Lochs' slight weakening this season.

It's rarely been a bundle of laughs for the Blues at Cameron Terrace, despite the titanic 2-1 HAC victory here in early June and a Lewis Cup win by the same score in August '09. Indeed, that same season, 2009, they endured a 0-9 Coop mauling here, followed by a gut-wrenching last-minute 2-3 League defeat which deprived them of the runners-up spot in the League; the year before, a 1-5 Lewis Cup thrashing; in '07, four defeats: 0-4 in the Jock Stein; 0-2 in the EaF, 2-3 in the League; and 1-4 in the Lewis Cup. And so on down the tunnel of the years, all the way back to June, 1980(!), in fact, to find the Blues' last away League victory against the Lochies, 4-1.

Tonight's game was vital to both sides' Championship aspirations: defeat for the Claret and Blues was not to be countenanced, 11 points behind the Blues with two games in hand; 5 and 6 behind West Side and Back respectively; while na Gormaich knew they had to maintain their 5-point advantage over the Bacachs, having played a game more. The unfolding news throughout the evening from Col Uarach was unlikely to inspire either team, however. Fortunately, Andrew "Tago" Maciver was present and a rested Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald returned on the right, though Donnie Macphail and Kenny "Beag" MacIennan were still unavailable; Kevin "Gochan" Macleod, out of sorts on Saturday, was preferred up front to the tireless Archie Macdonald, who dropped to the bench alongside Calum Macleod, Donald "D.I." MacIennan, Andrew "V.P." Macleod, and Kevin Anderson. Cameron Houston started for Lochs; Ally and Graeme Mackenzie in front of him; Roddy Morrison, David Macmillan, Peter and Peter Robbie Mackenzie, in midfield; on the left, Chris Mackay at the back, Ali "Tolsta" Maciver on the wing, and Donald "Nomie" Macdonald and Don "Lava" Macleod, leading. Thankfully for the Blues, an arch-tormentor, David Martin, was not around.

Conditions were treacherous, with a howling, rain-soaked nor'-easterly blowing straight into the home team's faces, in a first half which witnessed the players struggling to

control a swirling ball to build. There was an immediate replay of events at Lionacleite: in 2 minutes a vicious Maciver free-kick, out on the left, midway into the Carlway half, came flying over the line towards an alert Craigie to half-catch on the 6-metre line. The awkward ball broke down into a ruck off his palms; a messy scramble followed, before a defender's boot hit it high into the air, to be headed away, then booted to safety. Carlway settled into a rhythm, at feet, on the ground, and the strong wind became an extra player. "Dokus" and "Tago" were succeeding in creating space for themselves, dropping back and/or wide off withdrawn markers. On 7 minutes "Tago" was freed on the left, cut in, but his shot from 22 metres went well-wide to the right. On 11 minutes a beautifully-struck "Tago" free-kick from 24 metres to the right was pushed away high to his right by Houston, before "Tago" used the wind to send a central free-kick from 30 metres whistling past the left-hand post.

*"Shoot on sight; hit the target"* seemed to be a wise policy. In 23 minutes "Dokus" won the ball in a tackle, 22 metres out on the right, but the long arms of Houston palmed his low strike past. Two following corners led to "Dokus" hoisting the ball high over from 20 metres. A classic break on 22 minutes presented the Blues with their finest chance so far, with "Gochan" tracking back, winning the ball in a grinding tackle within his own half, then squaring it to a rapidly breaking Mackinnon to ship on immediately to Macleod bursting forward through the centre. Lochs were suddenly caught thin and spread for Macleod to send the golden diagonal for "Dokus" to run clear; but the wind carried it just beyond the desperately racing wing-man. On 26 minutes the opportunity was reversed when the ever-elusive "Nomie", wriggling clear in the dead space before the back-line, emulated Macleod's feat with a glorious ball to "Lava" ghosting off his marker right. He carried it wide into the box, but a moment's hesitation at the vital moment allowed Moody to pull off an excellent block. Two minutes later, a free-kick on the right saw an unmarked Peter Robbie picked out, 20 metres in front of goal, but his sidefoot clip was too weak into the wind, and it was carried away wide and high to the right.

Na Gormaich continued to try their luck from distance: snapshots from Mackinnon, from 25 metres, whistling past on the right and "Sqweg" over the bar from 20 metres. Then, the defining moment of the first half. A Lochs' charge on the left was broken up by "Pongo" who sent it onwards to Macleod storming through the centre. Again he laid the killer ball right, *à la* Cantona at his best, to "Gochan" to scream into the box like Jesse Owens, and crack the ball home from 16 metres, low to Houston's left. Macleod came close himself on 35 minutes from 22 metres, past the right-hand post, high, before the Champions, once more, almost levelled it, "Lava" escaping right to set up "Nomie" in front of goal, about 20 metres out, but his delicate chip cleared the bar. The tempo was ratchetting up and contact increasingly physical; tempers were fraying. In 41 minutes, more danger for the Blues when Ali "Tolsta" was sent spinning, 20 metres out, slightly to the left of the box, but the normally deadly dead-ball specialist, Macmillan, didn't clear the wall.

How both clubs harnessed the unrelenting wind in the second half was crucial. Both sides must have welcomed the opportunity to calm down and reflect; to map out their respective ways forward. Carlway, who had edged possession and chances, must have bitterly regretted the absence of a killer second goal, and desperately needed one - and fast, while Lochs would rue their failure to capitalize on at least one of their two golden breaks later in the half and two free-kicks on the edge of the Carlway box. Straightaway, "Lava" was freed wide on the right to whip a medium-height cut-back towards support advancing at speed into the Carlway box. The ball thwacked off the right arm/ shoulder of the covering Moody and was swept away. Unintentional certainly, but did it deny Lochs an advantage? You decide.

Momentum was now with the home team. On 57 minutes a crunching "Pongo" tackle on the right touchline, midway within his own half, led to a yellow card and to a flighted free-kick being knocked out to Peter Mackenzie, 20 metres out in front of goal. His shot

was charged down; then a second, and a third, before the ball was booted long and clear down the park. On 63 minutes a huge Houston clearance carried "Lava" clear on the right, once more, but his low cross was knocked away. The pace was now frenetic, with bad temper and over-zealous tackling the rule. 66 minutes had elapsed when another Claret surge led to a "Lava" strike in the box hitting a defender, which in turn led to a *melée* in the box, a clearance and return, another madcap scramble, then a Blues' break-out.

On 69 minutes a corner on the right led to Ali "Tolsta" being closed down on the left edge of the box, the ball spinning clear to the right, then being hacked away. Three minutes later a high whizzing clearance soared over the heads of the retreating Carloway back-line but spun away from the charging "Lava" into the arms of a vigilant Craigie. As Craigie raced past him to clear, inexplicably, "Lava" half-kicked out at/ half-tripped the goalkeeper. Robert Mackay had no choice but to red-card the striker. Whether or not this was a turning-point is debatable, but na Gormaich certainly reacted strongly to this unexpected advantage and within five minutes had effectively put the game out of Lochs' reach.

The eternal, uncompromising enablers in midfield, Crossley and "Sqweg", managed to impose themselves on midfield, before the ball was dispatched to an irrepressible Macleod coming through left of centre; he carried the ball swiftly towards the box before freeing "Gochan" coming in from the left. Houston got down well to his wicked low shot which was passing him to his left, but the greasy ball spun away from him leftwards to the lurking "Dokus" to smash home from 8 metres.

Champions don't surrender their crown meekly. If anything, Lochs switched up a gear, pressing the Carloway back-line to the end, but, without their main striker, were unable to gain a clear view of Craigie, and were forced to shoot from distance. This approach left huge gaps at the back for the Blues to exploit. On 82 minutes Crossley was sent through but his low strike was well-held by the keeper to his right. Then deep in injury-time, a 2-on-1 situation down the left and centre allowed Macleod to advance unmarked on Houston but the goalkeeper second-guessed him brilliantly to save once more, low to his right.

Not for the faint-hearted tonight, on or off the field. Two quality sides, battling the elements, and each other, for supremacy, with Carloway finally passing the finishing post by a neck. It was a contest distinguished by an unrelenting physical and creative competitiveness, fuelled by long-running personal and group rivalries, and super-charged throughout by a sustained tenseness which did not abate until the final few minutes, when it became increasingly evident which side was about to prevail. The diehard support certainly got their money's worth, though half of them were audibly disappointed.

For all that Lochs were visibly diminished by the absences of David Martin and Andy Murray, only a fine line, and moments of inspired teamwork and finishing, turned the final result in Carloway's direction. Dan Crossley, "Sqweg", and Seumas Macleod had a dogged edge on the Mackenzies and David Macmillan in the first period, with Macleod particularly assertive on the break and insightful in his final lay-offs, though the midfield battle went the latter's way in the second, when Peter Mackenzie established his presence. Until "Lava's" unfortunate departure, that is, when the scales once more tilted in na Gormaich's direction.

Yet even though Graeme and Ally Mackenzie were as rock-hard and faultless throughout as ever and as the Carloway back-line were also, the breaking pace and trickery of "Dokus" and "Tago" on either wing was never adequately contained, and the electric bursts of the '*on-message*' "Gochan" through the centre were as deadly as the attacking power of the "Nomie" and "Lava" combination once was. It was easy to see

why Lochs had only hit the target eighteen times in seven League games; they simply did not create enough clear-cut chances, and must, surely, now be content with the Jock Stein Cup and other cup silverware that comes their way this season. Carloway would once have been blissfully content with such consolation. Not now. Indeed, *quo vadis*, Carloway? They lie neck and neck with Back, as the final straight approaches. Who will falter first? And if they both do, the Siarachs might yet still come through on the inside rail.

**Lochs** Man of the Match: Graeme Mackenzie.

**Carloway** Man of the Match: Seumas Macleod.