

Lewis and Harris League:

# Carloway 2 (0) Athletic 4 (0)

Dan Crossley 59  
Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald 78

Dougie Maciver 52  
Graeme Macleod 79, 90  
Scott Maciver 83

Referee: Billy Macdonald.

At Cnoc a' Choilich.  
Wednesday, 27.7.11

Gordon Craigie

Andrew "Tago" Maciver Domhnall Mackay Seumas Macleod Darren Mackinnon  
Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Donnie Macphail Dan Crossley Murdo "Sqweq" Macleod (capt.) Gordon  
"Tago" Macdonald

Kevin "Gochan" Macleod

Subs.: Calum Macleod (Gordon "Tago" Macdonald) 69; Kenny "Beag" Macleannan (Donnie Macphail)  
85.

After last week's tense victory over local rivals, West Side, which probably concluded the latter's League aspirations, the next potential banana skin confronted the Blues in their quest for League glory, in the tricky shape of Athletic. It was to be their third meeting of the season, each having recorded a victory at Goathill, Aths 4-1 in the ABC, and Carloway 3-2 in the reverse League fixture.

Although the Hoops' early season promise had faded slightly, they still entertained hopes of overtaking the Siarachs for third spot in the League, boasting a healthy League record and goals for and against columns, 33-19, not dissimilar to Carloway's, and were still winning more often than they lost. Also, memories of the 7-1 Lewis Cup thrashing they inflicted on the Blues here roughly a year ago continued to resonate, despite the 6-1 revenge na Gormaich gained later the same month in the League, as this had been recorded against a vastly-understrength end-of-season eleven.

For the Blues, the iconic Calum Tom Moody was still suffering from a knee injury and Archie Macdonald unavailable, but Andrew "Tago" Maciver returned at right back, with Darren Mackinnon moving left; Seumas Macleod continued beside Domhnall Mackay in central defence, while Donnie Macphail came back in central midfield. Kenny "Beag" Macleannan featured in the squad at last, joining David Beaton, Donald "D.I." Macleannan, Kevin "Barra" Macneil, and Calum Macleod on the bench.

For Aths, Ali Walker was probably out for the season, with a spinal muscle injury, and Robert Jones was also unfit, but the man the Blues love to hate, Scott Maciver, unfortunately appeared, with Nic Davis fit again in central midfield. And so, yet again, it was, "*Cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war!*", and don't even think about what was happening at Col Uarach!

Carloway almost opened with another of their customary bangs, as, with only 3 minutes on the clock, Dan Crossley broke down the left, fed "Tago", and the ball was knocked away for a corner; the inswinging Macphail corner was met by an unchallenged Crossley on the 6-metre line. He barely moved to nod down and against Macritchie's left-hand post, before the ball was walloped clear. An untidy contest unfolded as each side grappled to establish a shape and rhythm in a rather flat first half, dominated by strong back-lines and two midfielders effectively negating

each other's efforts, though the early chances came the Blues' way. After 10 minutes Mackinnon burst down the left to lay off the killer ball between Gus Maciver and "Tago's" marker, for "Sqweg" to glide onto and cut back from the bye-line but Macritchie gathered safely. Four minutes later he reacted quickly to grab a Macphail shot from 20 metres as the midfielder cut in from the right.

A "Sqweg" free-kick from the halfway line was headed over from 18 metres by "Tago", before the Blues' captain ground through two bone-shuddering tackles in midfield to set up "Gochan" but the striker's shot from 22 metres went harmlessly past Macritchie's right-hand post. On 22 minutes, Aths finally came to life as Scott Maciver rode three tackles on the right, then travelled across the edge of the box to set up Davis, but his shot sailed high over the bar. On the half-hour the Blues' high back-line was suddenly caught cold as Maciver again escaped the leash to rob Domhnall Mackay, 10 metres into the Carloway half, and charge through on Craigie; the pair wrestled their way into the box but at the vital moment, 12 metres from goal on the right, as Maciver shaped up to shoot, a Mackay body-check from his right sent the striker crashing. Again, one of those decisions you see differently, according to which team you support. A legitimate shoulder charge or the use of excessive force?

On 33 minutes it was "Pongo's" turn to attempt the breakthrough, charging down the right to send a glorious high diagonal, midway into the Aths' half, over the retreating defence to the rapidly-arriving "Tago" at the back post but his ambitious scissor-kick from 8 metres slipped past. A minute later a "Sqweg" run set up a drive from 23 metres but Macritchie made the save look easy. However, always the danger lurked at the back, as despite attracting a cloud of aggressive defenders every time he was near the ball - like filings to a magnet - the elusive Maciver again made space for himself right on the front of the box, as a long ball from defence was nodded back to him by Graeme Macleod, but his shot cleared the bar. On 40 minutes a "Tago" free-kick, 25 metres out, wide on the left, was just too high for a charging line of attackers, 12 metres from goal.

After such an opening half, featuring two sides who seemed as if they might play all summer without scoring, the huge crowd might have been excused for being unable to imagine what was in store for them. Maciver, Macaulay(?), *et al* were dominating a misfiring Blues' forward line, with any wing-play non-existent, and na Gormaich's scoring hopes rested with the aggressive forward driving of "Sqweg" and the unpredictable inventiveness of Crossley, or the regular bursts of individual back men, a dangerous tactic, as a sudden game-changer proved in 52 minutes.

A break down the left by the irrepressible Maciver saw him release the perfect forward pass to his namesake, Dougie, running across the line in front of him to unleash an absolute right-foot cracker from 20 metres, straight as a die, shoulder-height across Craigie and just inside his left-hand post. The keeper saw it coming all the way but was helpless. Talk about a party-pooper!

Carloway reeled as if struck by Sonny Liston and it took them till the 57th minute to recover as "Pongo" thundered his way through two tackles on the right, cut wide, and released a hard low drive from 18 metres across goal but just out of reach of the unmarked "Gochan" and "Tago". A minute later a Mackinnon free-kick from the halfway line line was met by "Gochan" on the 6-metre line, at Macritchie's lefthand post, but the keeper made himself big to block magnificently; the ball rebounded, hit "Gochan", and crept past. However, on 59 minutes, Mackinnon burst forward towards the halfway line to slip to Crossley, and a moment of genius saw him

replicate his Ronaldinho impression, glide past three defenders, and send a beautiful low right-footer just inside Macritchie's right-hand post from 20 metres.

As na Gormaich eyed a winner, everyone wanted forward and the cellar door was left frighteningly ajar. An Aths' free-kick on the left was headed off for a corner on Carloway's left and this in turn led to a stramash in the Blues' box before the ball was booted down the park. On 63 minutes Crossley freed "Tago" on the left; he cut in but sent his shot wide of Aths' left-hand post from 18 metres. On 66 minutes a free-kick in front of goal, 23 metres out, was placed expertly through the wall by Macphail but Macritchie pushed away low to his left. A minute later a "Tago" feed from the left saw Crossley stab the ball against Macritchie's right-hand post from the edge of the box, and four minutes later a Macphail scoop from midfield over the defence saw "Dokus" running in to hook the ball sideways past the advancing keeper from 18 metres, but again the ball glanced off the post and away.

On 78 minutes Carloway finally thought they had made it home, when Calum Macleod broke left and sent a vicious low square cross, 6 metres from the bye-line, into a crowded box; miraculously, Macritchie managed to block two point-blank stabs at the ball, before "Dokus" forced it home at the back post. But, immediately, it was level pegging as Maciver won the ball on the right, moved in on goal but was forced wide, survived an attempted blocking tackle, and squared for the unmarked Macleod to send the ball low to Craigie's left from 12 metres.

The Blues came forward desperately, but again were caught by the long ball in front of Maciver bursting off his marker through the centre, to crash the ball home from 23 metres, high to Craigie's left. The Blues were now totally deflated. Their final chance came in 89 minutes when a strong high Calum Macleod cross, 20 metres out on the left, allowed "Dokus" to head back across goal, but Kenny "Beag" fired over from 8 metres. The *coup de grâce* arrived when Maciver managed to beat off a Seumas Macleod tackle on the left touchline, just inside the Blues' half, run in wide, and slip the ball to the unmarked Macleod, 18 metres out in front of goal, allowing him to send the ball home, low off Craigie's right-hand post.

Ah, well, not quite, "*the end of an auld sang*", but the league title took a massive step eastwards after this contest. Of course, every team inevitably loses points in any campaign, even the Man.Utds and Barcas of this world, but the momentum must surely be with the Bacachs now. Of course, Back face a massively congested fixture list in the coming six weeks, what with Coop Cup and HAC Finals, postponed League games, etc., and no doubt Carloway wish them well in these cups, as every extra game increases the likelihood of dropped League points. This, coupled with the loss of Fraser Macleod and Martin Maclean for a couple of games each, might throw an unexpected lifeline na Gormaich's way, and, hopefully, then, the 5th September in Carloway might yet decide the Championship's final destination.

However, in football, the accepted wisdom is that your destiny is in your own hands. If you win the games you feel you should, then you achieve what you believe are your deserts. Carloway have the ability to win their last four games, including the Back face-off; however, judging by this game, that cannot be considered a certainty. The back-four stayed on-message in the first half and managed to subdue Aths' deadliest attacker; but events necessitated a change of tactics early in the second half, as the early reverse and several in the side under-performing, coupled with some bad luck, caused the defence's centre of attention to shift to the other end of the park.

A well-worked move, finished off by an absolute peach, appeared to have dug them out of a hole; they then fought their way through some ill-luck to lead, then sank without trace, as the strong back-line's focus became an effort to kickstart a malfunctioning attack. However, the Scott Macivers, Fraser Macleods, and D.J. Clintons of the game are always there, waiting for just the opportunities that such strategies present, to punish the unwary whenever possible. It's why they're on the park, after all.

Athletic Man of the Match: Scott Maciver.

[Carloway](#) man of the Match: Dan Crossley.