

Lewis and Harris League:

Carloway 3 (0) Point 4 (2)

Calum Tom Moody 56
Kevin "Gogan" Macleod 59
Archie Macdonald 88

Sean Macleod 11
Steven Kettings 20
Alasdair Gillies 46
Willie Macaulay 85

At Cnoc a' Choilich.

Friday, 19.8.11.

Ref.: Calum "Chancey" Macleod.

David Beaton

Darren Mackinnon Andrew "Tago" Maciver Calum Tom Moody Donald "D.I." MacIennan
Dan Crossley Kenny "Beag" MacIennan Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod (capt.) Gordon "Tago" Macdonald
Kevin "Gogan" Macleod Calum Macleod

Subs.: Archie Macdonald (Kenny "Beag" MacIennan) 75.

In 'Swing Time', considered to be the best of the Astaire/ Rogers musicals, an exceptional score from Dorothy Fields includes the lyrics, "Nothing's impossible I have found, For when my chin is on the ground, I pick myself up, Dust myself off, Start all over again." It didn't clarify in the match programme whether such sentiments ran through the minds of the Carloway squad as they gazed down Cnoc a' Choilich at the eleven figures dressed in Arsenal shirts facing them. Maybe, the response was closer to "Déjà vu", or "Déjà subi (suffered)", more like, as their eyes turned heavenwards to wonder why Lady Fortune seemed continually to smile and rain gifts on the east of Lewis, while unloading juggernauts of sludge on the west.

For an hour the previous Monday, Carloway must have imagined that a ray of sunshine was unexpectedly appearing above their League campaign, even more so when Andrew Maciver was invited to take an early shower at Goathill, but then a cruel Wagnerian god appeared and a dark, dark cloud - four of them, in fact - entered their valley of emerging joy.

So, once more, our gallant stormtroopers had to re-enter the arena, compete ferociously, and hope for the best. And even if they did believe the above, staffing exigencies ruled instead: Domhnall Mackay was off the island, Seumas Macleod unavailable, and livewire right-half/ forward, Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald ruled out unfit at the pre-match treadmill. In-form David Beaton retained the No.1 shirt, while, at the back, Darren Mackinnon moved right to cover for Andrew "Tago" Maciver joining Calum Tom Moody as joint stopper, allowing "D.I." MacIennan to come in on the left. The twin body blow in midfield of the unavailability of "Dokus" and Seumas Macleod meant Gordon "Tago" Macdonald returned at left midfield/wing with Kenny "Beag" MacIennan given the nod ahead of Donnie Macphail in the centre, while an adventurous line-up was completed with "Gogan" partnering Calum Macleod up front. *Abair sgioba!* Nothing could go wrong, could it?

Rubhach weather seemed to have accompanied the Point eleven westwards, judging by the nasty, swirling sou' westerly which rammed squall after squall into their faces, as Carloway started off with the expected rush, seeking to maintain their League challenge quickly and also, no doubt, do what they felt they should have done at Garrabost in the Moldova Lewis. Getting the ball forward at the right height and pace, however, was a game-long problem for both sides.

After 5 minutes a trademark Moody 40-yarder was controlled perfectly on the left by "Gogan" crossing the back-line inwards on the edge of the box but his early strike

cleared the bar. Minutes later Crossley was hacked down on the left and "Sgweg" sent an exquisite floater into the central box from midway into the Point half; Moody nodded it down under pressure; "Gogan" was blocked, and the ball spun away sharply for a corner. Two fruitless corners followed. Then, of course, the sucker punch: the clearance was fired downfield. Beaton kicked clear. An untidy scramble just inside the Carloway half led to a Point break on the right and the ball being swept away for a corner. The corner set up a weak Point header forward and downwards in a crowded box; a block; and then the ball breaking at an awkward height to Sean Macleod 10 metres out in front of goal, but he did well to chop the ball downwards through a ruck and into the net.

"*This changes nothing*", seemed to be the approach of the Blues, but it did. With Alasdair Gillies and Iain Mackenzie rivetted to the front of the Rubhach penalty box, complementing each other perfectly, Gillies excellent in the air and creative with distribution; Mackenzie the Ramelow blocker/ tackler, na Gormaich were unable to penetrate the centre effectively. "Gogan" was drifting right; "Tago" drifting back, eager for the ball and wide of a high back-line but largely unsupplied, leaving Macleod increasingly isolated to chase and harry. Crossley, "Sqweg", and Kenny "Beag" were dogged in midfield but a shape and rhythm could not be found, and "Pongo", Moody, and Mackinnon increasingly resorted to their customary surges to get the wheels turning. Dangerous, with predators like Murray(?) and Kettings patrolling the dead zone between midfield and back-line.

On 20 minutes a clearance found Kettings controlling the ball beautifully, 22 metres out, leftish, in the Blues' half, turning in and trying a snap daisy-cutter, low to Beaton's right. The keeper had it covered at full stretch, but an attempted "Pongo" block saw the ball spin up high over Beaton and home.

The boys in blue might well have been asking themselves, "*What sins did we collectively commit in former lives?*", at this point. "*Are we to defy Fate itself?*" They continued their struggle, "Gogan" winning the ball immediately on the right and racing in, but MacLennan saved comfortably from 16 metres. On 24 minutes a Calum Macleod drive from the same distance on the left hit the side netting. A 40-metre "Pongo" run took him to the edge of the box and his chip was just agonisingly out of reach of the racing "Tago", 12 metres out on the left.

On 31 minutes another surge saw "Pongo" slip the ball right to "Gogan" on the right edge of the box, but "Gogan's" perfect wall-pass return led to "Pongo's" thump being blocked. The ball ping-ponged around the area; there were two further blocks, and eventually the ball was sent whizzing down field. On 41 minutes it was Calum Tom's turn to coast forward, before his attempt was blocked on 16 metres; another scramble ensued, and the ball hacked away.

What do you say at half-time to eleven young men who are competing relentlessly in order to achieve the success they feel they deserve, dominating possession, and creating a series of reasonable chances, but, mystifyingly, find themselves two down? A tactical decision seemed to have caused Carloway to have reverted to their favoured Mancini formation in the second half: two wing-backs on either side of two stoppers; two holding midfielders backing up two wide men, either side of an advanced midfielder supporting the lone central striker. As at Garrabost, however, its effectiveness was untested as the nightmare grew even murkier. An immediate Rubhach break on the left was headed past on the left. The resulting corner was met by an unmarked Gillies centrally, 10 metres out, and he stooped towards the ball to head it through a line of defenders and in.

Caution disappeared right away, as the Blues now went for broke. On 48 minutes "Gogan" escaped on the right, cut in, but was blocked inside the box. A "Sqweg" corner on the left was headed past by Calum Tom. A further Moody header drifted past off a "Sqweg" corner, before a shaft of light appeared in Carloway's valley of gloom, when a third "Sqweg" corner on 56 minutes was head-lobbed by a battling Moody from 10 metres, high to Maclennan's left and the keeper was unable to fight his way along his crowded goal-line to prevent the ball dropping inside the bar/ post junction. Game on! Three minutes later "Tago" finally received a ball at feet, facing forward, midway within the Point half, and broke at speed down the left. His stunning low diagonal behind the retreating defence was met perfectly by "Gogan" racing in to sweep high and home from 16 metres in the centre.

A period of intense pressure followed from na Gormaich: another Moody header was blocked in the box, before Point survived a strong penalty claim as "Caley" was bundled over in the box from behind as he raced on to a through ball from Crossley. Moments later Maclennan almost lost a cross-shot from the right in the swirling wind and, luckily, touched the ball on to his own bar. However, lack of numbers at the back began to offer the opposition increasing opportunity, as Moody now operated as an auxiliary centre-forward and the remaining back-line pushed dangerously high.

On 69 minutes a Point break left Beaton one-on-one on the left, but he blocked brilliantly for a corner. Frenetic Carloway forward play continued but the chances began to disappear as pace drained reserves, Point defended in depth, and cleared long. Eventually, Carloway's lives ran out in 85 minutes as a clearance found Murray and Macaulay breaking together from the halfway line. Their twin-move was forced left by "Pongo" and the rapidly arriving Moody, but 12 metres from goal, wide on the right, Murray managed to slip the ball inwards to Macaulay, who, in turn, stepped one pace inside Moody and curled a beautiful low shot ever so neatly round the diving Beaton and just inside the far post.

Amazingly, a final flurry by Carloway saw them claw yet another one back on 88 minutes before the tank ran empty. Another storming surge by Crossley and "Sqweg" out of midfield saw the ball moved forward to Moody, 25 metres out, to the left of goal, and his deadly low diagonal rightwards, across the retreating back-line, found Archie Macdonald ghosting wide to the right off his marker at pace, to slip the ball past the advancing Maclennan from 16 metres and just inside the keeper's right-hand post.

Football, like life, can seem (perhaps, actually is!) desperately unfair and if a person has nothing better to do, he/she can torture him/herself repeatedly by asking, "*If I do everything about 80% correctly, why don't good things come my way?*" Therein lies madness. Seeking justice, like some underlying principle running throughout the universe, is futile. Carloway have endured a bad fortnight regarding luck and refereeing decisions. But what can be done about such setbacks? Stay angry and shout at every official? Leave the entrails of a chicken at every altar on the island? No. The fates are implacable and beyond our understanding. The appropriate phrase *du jour* is, "*Chill out*", or, in real language, "*Get over it. Realise that s --- happens, and look forward*".

Back and Carloway have the broadest quality squads on the island at the moment and deserve to be vying for supremacy, but it's a short window: Lochs will be back, you can be sure; United are emerging; West and Aths are always hovering. The

moment is everything in football. So why are Back so successful at the moment, while Carloway are not, when the squad feel they should be? When a quality squad made up of a wide range of gifted footballers doesn't achieve what they believe are their just rewards, hopefully the odd addition might help, then a few simple tweaks might complete the redraft.

A Scott Macaulay or a "Savo" would be beneficial, even a Mario Balotelli, alongside Calum Macleod, Archie Macdonald, or Kevin "Barra". A dedicated marker for pests like Kettings, Fraz Mac, D.J., or Scott Maciver? Perhaps. Tonight a committed Carloway did most things correctly, although more firepower was needed up front, especially in the first half, when Daniel Maclennan could have been tested more against the strong wind, although Gillies and Mackenzie performed admirably at the back protecting him. Failure to attack the ball might have led to goals one to three, yet bad luck basically cost the second, although the elusive Steven Kettings might have been closed down more swiftly; the fourth was lost simply because the Blues were chasing and chasing up front. However, a significant problem seemed to be coming through from midfield, where, despite "Sqweg", Dan Crossley, and Kenny "Beag" tackling and forcing as if their lives depended on it, the killer balls would not come often enough, right and left to "Gogan" and "Tago" or between the stoppers for "Caley", to get behind the line.

Carloway Man of the Match: Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod.

Point Man of the Match: Stephen Kettings.