

Lewis and Harris League:

**Harris 1 (0)**      **Carloway 6 (2)**

*John Sutton 88*

*Calum "Caley" Macleod 16, 18, 49, 76  
Kevin "Gochan" Macleod 51  
Darren Mackinnon 68 (pen.)*

*Referee: Billy Macdonald.*

*At Rally Park.  
Monday, 29.8.11*

*David Beaton*

*Andrew "Tago" Maciver Seumas Macleod Calum Tom Moody Darren Mackinnon  
Kevin "Barra" Macneill Donnie Macphail Dan Crossley Murdo "Sqweq" Macleod (capt.)  
Kevin "Gochan" Macleod Calum "Caley" Macleod*

*Subs.: Iain Murdo Macleod (Dan Crossley) 53; Kevin Anderson (Murdo "Sqweq" Macleod) 77; Gordon Craigie (Calum "Caley" Macleod) 77.*

Carloway's long and winding road to glory which began last April led south for the first time to the windswept pitch beside Sir E. Scott School in Harris, on what was to be their fifth, and last, excursion of 2011 beyond the Lewis border. Looking back down the tunnel of the months, the Blues can clearly be seen to have progressed, and stumbled, through a wide-ranging kaleidoscope of hopes, dreams, and disappointments since that April evening at Cnoc a' Choilich when, led by their iconic talisman, Calum Tom Moody, they prevailed, 2-0, over a stubborn United side, and started off on a bewilderingly successful League campaign which has seen them progress, deservedly, to the fringes of League history.

Of course, there have been nights of misery (isn't that part of the fun?), evenings when, perhaps, they, individually or collectively, feel they have been found wanting, but the commitment, desire, and effort of the squad have not wavered in the slightest throughout the summer, as they have sought, bold as lions, the ultimate prize in island football. After all, isn't it, *"better by far you should forget and smile than that you should remember and be sad,"* and continue to believe that three final victories are achievable, and that time and chance might happen to na Gormaich after all?

Victory tonight was essential, with an equivalent hope that Lochs might fatally wound Back's aspirations at Col Uarach. However, injury and unfortunate circumstance, once again, influenced selection: Domhnall Mackay was suspended and Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald unfit, while Archie Macdonald, Kenny "Beag" MacIennan, and Gordon "Tago" Macdonald were unavailable. In addition, Donald "D.I." MacIennan was involved in an accident scare en route to Tarbert and also had to be ruled out. So what looked like an aggressive 4-4-2 formation lined up against the unpredictable Hearachs: Beaton, "Pongo", and Mackinnon continued as before; Seumas Macleod reprised his joint stopper role beside Calum Tom, and Kevin "Barra" had his first start, in a forward right midfield position alongside Macphail, Crossley, and "Sqweq"; and the irrepressible "Gochan" and "Caley" led. The Harris line-up appeared to have numerous absentees: no Calum Masson, "Koch", etc.

Norman Mailer once said that, at the start of his career, a writer is all inspiration and no craft, whereas at the end he is all craft and no inspiration. Carloway's level of skill may be arguable, but there appear to be unlimited barrels of inspiration on tap in

the Blues' dressing room, handy at this point in the campaign. After an awkward opening five minutes, as both sides struggled to harness a gale-force westerly, Carloway managed to manoeuvre into a grip of midfield and burst forward in repeated low attack into the howling wind. On 7 minutes a central defence-splitter from the halfway line by "Sqweq" found "Gochan" leaving the line for dead. Macrae was out like a flash to block expertly; the ball broke left, pursued by "Gochan", but before he could finish, Lewis "Louie" Macdonald intervened to boot it clear. Moments later, another golden ball allowed "Barra" to ghost behind a high back-line on the right but his carefully-measured shot from 18 metres went wide of the Harris right-hand post.

The Hearachs were floundering at this point: repeatedly overhitting, losing the ball forward, then lacking shape as Carloway passed the ball forward along the line, then forward, either by killer diagonal or loft, to the fast-breaking "Gochan", Calum Macleod, or "Barra", or carried through the centre by the dogged Crossley. A goal seemed inevitable: on 16 minutes another glorious Jimmy McIlroy-type splitter through the centre from "Sqweq" found "Gochan" once more behind the line, beating the keeper left; another scramble as "Louie" and Hacker managed to intercept, then the ball being moved left, to be controlled 16 metres out by a cool-as-cucumber "Caley", who stayed calm, moved in and slipped it low past the lunging defenders on the line.

A vicious Esslemont corner from Carloway's left almost threw the Hearachs a life-line but was headed off the Carloway line by "Barra"(?) before another excellently-worked goal extended the Blues' lead. A midfield battle saw Crossley lose the ball under pressure, win it back, then release "Barra" off his marker, moving through on the right. He carried it into the box, bided his moment, then slipped it 12 metres square across the retreating defence, for "Caley" to slide home.

On 22 minutes a Kyle Macleod free-kick from 23 metres was safely handled by Beaton before there was yet another "Sqweg"/ "Gochan" link-up. Again Macrae was out like lightning to collide with "Gochan" on the edge of the box; again the ball broke left, pursued by "Gochan", and from 14 metres he whipped the ball back towards the unguarded goal but the chasing pack managed to deflect it on to the bar and clear. A storming Crossley was crowded out as he burst through the centre before a Harris break on the left led to their first real chance of the half: an across-goal strike from Mulhearn, competently palmed away for a corner by Beaton at full-stretch to his left.

On 36 minutes a Mackinnon free-kick from 22 metres in the centre just cleared the bar, before the half ran down with a spell of Harris pressure: another deadly Esslemont corner was headed over wastefully, before a break on the left on the whistle saw a Campbell strike from inside the box blocked on to the bar and clear.

Whether or not Harris might have built on this promising ten-minute conclusion to the first half remained unanswered as, buoyed by the wind and no doubt spurred on by the depressing news from north of Stornoway, Carloway slammed forward out of the starting blocks. Immediately a foul on 20 metres, to the right of the Hearach box, allowed Calum Macleod to complete his hat-trick with the sweetest of Beckham-style free-kicks just over the wall and high inside Macrae's right hand post.

It clearly shattered the Harris boys as two minutes later, Craig Hacker, moving out of defence, midway within his own half, lost the ball to the back-tracking "Gochan", who ran on, drew the keeper. and slipped it home. Two minutes later, the arrival of

debutant, Ian Murdo Macleod, at left-back, with Darren Mackinnon switching to central midfield for the injured Dan Crossley, coincided with Harris apparently ditching caution and deciding to throw everything at na Gormaich.

A full-on stalemate developed, as Carloway now seemed happy to be pushed back, then tackle hard in midfield and defence to set up the killer diagonals suddenly forward and exploit a dangerously high Hearach back-line and wing-backs pushing hard in support on either flank. In football, it's not what's right or wrong; it's what works. However, the Carloway line remained solid and the chances would not come, despite several dangerous high forward balls. Nevertheless, a team cannot squeeze play for long from the back if their midfield is not getting tight and the Carloway half-backs still held, made space, and broke.

On the hour a "Gochan" connect saw "Sqweg" on the edge of the box blocked for a corner. In 68 minutes another sweep down the right saw a low cross won by Macphail, 12 metres out to the right of goal. He turned back to supply; Andy Morrison stuck out an intercepting foot; down Macphail went. Bad luck; Mackinnon converted without fuss wide to Macrae's right.

Harris still gamely came forward: a Macleod free-kick on 76 minutes on the right, 23 metres out, was headed away. Beaton gathered, booted downfield, and found Calum Macleod racing far behind the Harris defence on the left, to slip under the helpless keeper from the edge of the box.

With defence seemingly no longer a priority for the Hearachs and all-out attack the preferred option, chances now flowed for the Blues: on 82 minutes a corner forced Macrae to react swiftly to block Moody in front of goal. Craigie was then sent through the centre, was flagged offside, waved on, then was blocked by the keeper; the ball broke back to Mackinnon just outside the box, but his drive cleared the bar. Two minutes later a Macphail drive from 20 metres was blocked by the keeper's legs before Harris finally got a reward for their efforts. A break on the right seemed to have been cleared but an untidy scramble developed; the ball rebounded back and forth, before being slotted through to John Sutton moving in on the right and from 10 metres he managed to run in and slip it neatly across Beaton and inside the keeper's far right-hand post.

A final piece of theatre witnessed Craigie have a Kanu moment on the whistle: sent clear behind the defence, he invited Macrae to commit himself, then fired it past the prone keeper - and the post - from 16 metres. One for Facebook!

It's difficult to evaluate what lessons, if any, Carloway might take from this unusual match into their intriguing fixture next Monday. From mid-season, they have known that they will have to do some sort of job on the Bacachs at Cnoc a' Choilich, at least, not lose to them. Now they know for certain they - and United - have to beat them, then hope at Fivepenny Ness play like Harris did tonight. It's not beyond possibility. Well, perhaps the last part is.

Harris seemed uncharacteristically weak tonight and simply could not impose any shape on their game. Despite some nice touches from Esslemont on the left and Macleod's and Morrison's attempts to impose themselves in the centre, Sutton later on, the Harris eleven were contained comfortably by the Blues, then at times in danger of being swamped by them when na Gormaich broke forward in groups at speed. Carloway's back-line was little pressured till late in the each half, while Crossley, "Sqweg", and Macphail dominated the first-half midfield, abetted by the

thrusting Mackinnon and "Pongo". Crossley's early disappearance certainly diminished this effectiveness, but the pace and drive of "Gochan", "Caley", and "Barra" remained constant dangers game-long. In fact, there was nothing conspicuously different or instructive about the Blues' performance; commitment and control were the main weapons. No one was missing in action.

The Halls and Macleans, etc. from the east, of course, will be a wildly different proposition next week but Carloway have nothing to fear, coming away from this cold-blooded execution. Although the title seems to be heading inexorably Collwards, on this form next week's collision could go any way. Worth looking forward to in its own right to conclude League 2011!

Harris Man of the Match: Benn Esslemont.

Carloway Man of the Match: Calum "Caley" Macleod.