

Lewis and Harris League:

Carloway 2 (0) Back 2 (0)

Andrew "Tago" Maciver 75, 88

Kevin "Bloxy" Murray 57
Fraser Macleod 66

Referee: Robert Mackay.

At Cnoc a' Choilich.
Monday, 5.9.11

David Beaton

Andrew "Tago" Maciver Calum Tom Moody Domhnall Mackay Darren Mackinnon
Chris Macleod Donnie Macphail Seumas Macleod ☒ Murdo "Sqweq" Macleod (capt.)
Kevin "Gochan" Macleod ☒ Calum "Caley" Macleod

Subs.: Kenny "Beag" MacIennan (Chris Macleod) 68; Gordon "Tago" Macdonald (Donnie Macphail) 68.
Yellow cards: Seumas Macleod 63; Kevin "Gochan" Macleod 67.

And so, the clock had finally run down, as we had always knew it must, and the "*Fiat voluntas Tua*" moment was upon us. A time to settle things. Not as completely and decisively as it once might have been, but decisively enough. Back could afford to lose and still win, but nothing could be sweeter than to triumph at the ground of their main challengers, to drive their superiority home. The Bacachs, themselves, had already experienced their own version of the end-of-season misery they hoped to inflict on Carloway, one previous September not so long ago, when a mistimed "Moley" back-header had left "Tohan" stranded, and Don "Lava" had wrapped up the Championship for Lochs, 2-1, at Col Uarach.

Defeat against Athletic and Point had left na Gormaich vulnerable and in no doubt of the task ahead of them, with victory essential, yet even that no longer would guarantee the Number 1 spot, and a further United win would be necessary for the celebration to begin, not to mention victory at Fivepenny, which, of course, should never be taken for granted, as even Back had needed a last-minute equalizer there, to save their red faces on the opening day of the season.

Injury ruled out Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald (knee strain) and Dan Crossley (broken fingers), while Archie Macdonald continued to be unavailable. However, Domhnall Mackay's suspension was served and the back five returned to shape, while Chris Macleod was on the island and included in "Dokus's" favoured right midfield/ wing spot, with Kevin "Gochan" Macleod and Calum "Caley" Macleod leading, in an adventurous bid for pace and directness to unsettle. The men from the East didn't arrive looking for prisoners however, despite the absence of Chris Macleod, with Frazer Macleod lying right in attack, Murray Macleod patrolling left, and Kevin "Bloxy" Murray and Chris Adams shape-shifting in the centre. It's the sort of occasion in which every player dreams of participating; anyone in awe of such an event or doubtful that they can perform should take up gardening - or reading.

When was the last time three brothers started for Carloway? One for Stats. On a beautifully-cut pitch, set out in radiating concentric circles, a brusque opening delivered a statement of intent from both sides; no one had arrived to admire, but to compete - and hard.

Both back-lines were solid on the mark and in the tackle, both goalkeepers well-guarded; the battleground was the midfield, especially the centre, with Martin Maclean dominant early, supported by a strong D.J. Macdonald coming through right at every opportunity. The line repeatedly edged into the Carloway half but

"Pongo", Domhnall Mackay, Calum Tom, and Darren Mackinnon were steadfast as Frazmac pulled them wide, Murray Macleod ran long on the left, while "Bloxy" shielded and held, as he awaited back-up from Adams *et al*, with Martin Maclean charging through in support. "Sqweg", Chris and Seumas Macleod, and Macphail found it hard to supply "Gochan" and "Caley" early, retreating frequently to hold.

On 7 minutes an early Martin Maclean shot from 22 metres warmed Beaton's hands, before a 12th minute corner on Carloway's left was cleared to the centre line where a strong Maclean interception saw him surge forward to supply Frazer breaking right; neat interplay back and forth through Frazer, Adams, and Maclean ended with a Macleod chip over the bar, 16 metres out on the right. On 16 minutes a Chris Macleod turn and shot moving in from the right 22 metres out was Carloway's first real effort, before Back nearly opened their account - twice. On 21 minutes D.J. won the ball on the right on the centre line and moved forward fast to feed "Bloxy" on the edge of the box. He shielded expertly, then returned the favour square to the arriving Macdonald to force Beaton to palm away at full stretch to his right. The pace was quickening. Immediately a Maclean golden diagonal was cleared for another corner to Carloway's right and an inviting in-swinger found an unmarked Inny Red(?) cracking a header off the Carloway crossbar from 10 metres centrally.

Finally, on 27 minutes, na Gormaich managed to escape the Bacach stranglehold and a few home openings materialized: a "Sqweg" free-kick just inside the Back half on the right finding Calum Tom, 16 metres from goal, in a crowded box, but the ball was high and he was unable to direct his header. He retrieved it wide, and won na Gormaich's first corner on the left. Again Moody won in the air, centrally 8 metres out, but his glancing header was drifting past as Mackay whipped it against "Tohan's" chest, and past. The resulting corner was cleared back to "Caley" who eventually returned it but Seumas Macleod was unable to get any power on his header, 12 metres out. However, an immediate break on the Carloway left saw a freed Frazmac fire a glorious chance over from 20 metres. Three minutes later David Beaton almost lost a high Macdonald free-kick, from 10 metres into the Carloway half, in the sun, before recovering excellently to claw it away from the junction of bar and post to his right.

There was no doubt a more creative Back outfit had edged first-half proceedings against a committed Carloway side, who held well, but apart from that short period on the half-hour, were unable to create; but, as in life itself, regretting lost opportunities is a common leitmotif in sport. Immediately, a cleverly-taken Maclean free-kick, midway inside the Carloway half, to the left, caught a defence awaiting a trademark drive wrong-footed as it was slipped to Murray Macleod, but his low cross-drive was probably going wide before being blocked on the 6-metre line by Moody and cleared before Frazer could pounce.

A spell of Carloway pressure saw a corner on the left lead to shots by "Caley", then Seumas Macleod, then "Gochan", being beaten down, before Adams broke through on the Back right but was edged out by Mackinnon. Just as the contest seemed to be evening up, the game-changer arrived. On 57 minutes, a Back surge down the left, and a glorious early cross from Maclean, midway within the half, out on the left touchline, found Adams ghosting wide of the line to the right, to reverse-head back along the 6-metre line to "Bloxy", initially appearing too high, but Murray managed to climb somehow to head-lob expertly into the centre of the Carloway goal, where a despairing Beaton could only help the ball on its way into the net.

All to play for; the pace ratcheted up but for Carloway, despite "Pongo" and Calum Tom becoming auxiliary attackers, clear chances still would not come, and

dangerous gaps appeared at the back. A Chris Macleod turn inside and a shot from 20 metres flew over, before a Domhnall Mackay free-kick from the centre line was cleared. Then the classic killer break appeared: as na Gormaich pressed desperately, Chris Adams led the charge out of his own half deep into opposition territory, slipped wide to the leftwards-racing Murray Macleod, kept advancing to receive the wall-pass return and, as David Beaton challenged on the left, sidestepped him neatly to cross square beyond Mackay and enable an isolated Frazer Macleod, almost on the goal-line, to tap home.

It really was the defining moment of the season for Carloway, their own "*Mene mene tekel upharsin*" moment. What does any squad do in such circumstances? Kevin Anderson and Graeme Miller reacted bravely. Immediately Kenny "Beag" and "Tago" on for Donnie Macphail and Chris Macleod, and the drive forward now became frenetic, as higher gears kept being found in the gear-box. Back let them come: if the system works, why tinker with it? The line was secure; their own breaks forward were threatening.

Right away Kenny "Beag" had a turn and shot blocked on the right from 18 metres before Seumas Macleod shot over from 20 metres. With fifteen minutes left on the clock Lady Fortune finally smiled on Carloway: a "Sqweg" interception in his own half saw him feed "Pongo" moving into the Back half; he checked and squared to Domhnall Mackay coming forward in the centre, who in turn passed it down the line to Mackinnon on his left, who had time to switch it to his right and send a glorious Martin Peters cross curving over the back-line inwards to the far post, just too far for "Tohan" to cut it out, a defence's nightmare ball, too high for the leaping Seumas Macleod but perfect for the arriving "Pongo" to nod past the helpless keeper.

What next? All defensive software now seemed erased from the Carloway hard drive as they charged. However, on 80 minutes Chris Adams robbed Seumas Macleod in midfield, broke forward through a thin defence, but sent the ball over from 20 metres. Two minutes later a carbon-copy Mackinnon cross found "Gochan" on the edge of the box, to volley square left for "Caley" to turn and shoot, but quality handling from "Tohan" made the save look easy.

On 84 minutes another exquisite Martin Maclean golden diagonal to his right found Frazmac ghosting behind Mackay to kill the title race stone dead, but as he drew Beaton well, 16 metres out on the right one-on-one, the ball bobbed exactly at the wrong moment and was lobbed over the keeper - and the bar - from 12 metres. It could have been costly, as, amazingly, with two minutes of normal time left, Carloway forced an electric conclusion to the evening, a Seumas Macleod corner on the left finding the redoubtable "Pongo" running along the line six metres out to outleap his marker and back-glance the ball to Tohan's left. With four minutes added-on time to endure, the pace - not to mention the challenges - became breathtaking, but, try as they might, Carloway could not get another clear sight of Tohan. Indeed, just on the whistle, it was the Bacachs who might have got the winner as a break down the Back right forced Beaton to block brilliantly with his knees, a shot from 10 metres out on his left.

Whew! Abair oidhche! Perhaps, taken as a discrete unit, this was a fair result on the night, but was anyone thinking in those terms? The first half was certainly Back's, as they effectively controlled midfield, with Martin Maclean's performance combining elements of Billy Bremner, David Hay, and Paddy Crerand at their best: the weighted tackling, the forward surge and the early diagonal; while Murray Macleod's control on the left was reminiscent of Christophe Dugarry.

Carloway were unable to break this hold until the half-hour and even then, the Back back-line remained resolute and impregnable till the last quarter-hour, while "Tohan", like David Beaton, was flawless. Na Gormaich were doing everything right, playing to their strengths; they simply faced a strong, confident unit, in turn exploiting their strengths; "Bloxy" was an especial pain in the collective Carloway a---, impossible to force off the ball as he repeatedly held up play to await the arrival of the cavalry.

Yet, in many games, if you remain in the contest long enough, invariably the chances must appear and, after all the frustration of covering, tackling, and running, Carloway's first, like both the opposition's, was to result from a beautiful, sweeping move. Coming through, from goalkeeper, to midfield, into the opposition half, performances were exemplary, effort 110%, while "Gochan, "Caley", and Chris Macleod, ably supported by the endlessly committed Seumas, ran themselves to a standstill, but their pace and movement failed to disturb the Back stoppers long enough and often enough to turn the game Carloway's way. It was the eventual arrival of the big men - Calum Tom and "Pongo" - that created the waves that caused the breathtaking finale. The evening's display was a credit to everyone on Cnoc a' Choilich.

Congratulations, Back! Worthy Champions!
And congratulations to Carloway on their first-ever Runners-Up spot!

[Carloway](#) Man of the Match: Andrew "Tago" Maciver.

[Back](#) Man of the Match: Martin Maclean.