

Lewis & Harris League:

United 1 (1) Carloway 4 (1)

*Steven Dunn 7 (pen.) Seumas Macleod 43
Dan Crossley 46
Scott Macaulay 54
Andrew "Tago" Maciver 65*

*At Goathill Park, Stornoway.
Monday, 14.5.12.
Ref.: George Macaskill.*

David Beaton

*Seumas Macleod Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Gus Maciver Donald "D.I." MacIennan
Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Andrew "Tago" Maciver Dan Crossley Gordon "Tago"
Macdonald*

Kevin "Gochan" Macleod Scott Macaulay

*Subs.: Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod (Gordon "Tago" Macdonald) 63; Donnie Macphail (Kenny
"Dokus" Macdonald) 75; Kevin "Barra" Macneil (Scott Macaulay) 84.*

The usual tricky fixture awaited Carloway as they travelled to one of their least favoured grounds, already smarting from a 0-3 drubbing at Goathill to Athletic in the ABC a month ago. The opening-day defeat to Lochs has meant that henceforth every League point has taken on a new level of significance, to ensure the Blues continue to feature in any League Championship race. In the corresponding fixture last July na Gormaich ground out an unconvincing 2-0 win, thanks to Dan Crossley's early moment of magic and Archie Macdonald's late clincher, their minds no doubt focussed on Maryburgh the following Saturday and a first-ever HAC QF, against Kirkwall Rovers. That was the excuse any way. The previous August, in 2010, had seen an evening punctuated by curious defending, an unfortunate penalty, a sending-off, and dressing-room histrionics.

After last week's astonishing 5-1 victory over the Champions - a night when, unbelievably, everything went right (how often in life does that happen?)- the team picked itself: 4-4-2, with "Pongo" unexpectedly available, though he won't be for the Point game this Friday and the JS Cup against Lochs a week today. Calum Tom Moody, of course, will be out for some time. The usual suspects faced them - Gordon "Gordy" Mackenzie, Tom Lawrence, Liam Coleman, Stuart Macdonald - with Steven Dunn, but Martainn Shields was probably otherwise engaged at Garrabost, there was no Scott Morrison and, thankfully, no bête noir from the past, Daniel Keenan.

Lately Carloway have been treating their fans to explosive openings, in trademark kick-off rushes. Unfortunately, the supporters experienced the reverse tonight, as Carloway were to monopolise first-half territory and possession but without really threatening. In 2 minutes a wicked "Tago" free-kick, 22 metres out on the left, whizzed low across goal, 8 metres out, without any takers. Two minutes later Macaulay and "Gochan" broke from the halfway line and the former's low driven cross from the right, 22 metres out, found "Gochan" storming in on the left edge of the box but he lost control at the vital moment.

Then, in the 7th minute, Christmas arrived early for the Wasps. A flighted free-kick from midway within the Carloway half was knocked away on the edge of the box by "Tago's" raised elbow. An expert penalty, shoulder-high to Beaton's right-hand stanchion, left the goalkeeper transfixed on his line.

The Blues continued to dominate play but dogged defending denied any clear chances - at either end. On 30 minutes a Macaulay run was halted 22 metres out centrally; "Tago's" careful free-kick cleared the wall but went straight to "Gordy". Nine minutes later a United free-kick was cleared; the ball was returned loosely into Blues' territory and the unexpected leaders received another gift. A short pass-back from "D.I." allowed the still-retreating Coleman to tip the ball beyond the stranded Beaton, to his left, but before he could follow up to convert, 8 metres out, Gus Maciver rescued the Blues with a brilliant saving tackle.

On 43 minutes, the goal arrived for Carloway that was increasingly looking unlikely on the evening arrived for Carloway; brilliantly executed and stunning in its simplicity. A "Tago" corner on the right was met at the near post by the leaping Seumas Macleod and headed straight and powerfully into the roof of the net. Immediately there might have been a second, as "Gochan" broke free on the right; 22 metres out he cut the early ball low to the racing Macaulay in the centre, and he likewise transferred it leftwards to the breaking "Tago", but the ball spun away from him on the edge of the box.

An old cliché in football says, *"If they had scored one, they'd have scored a barrowload !"* There is, of course, no way of proving this piece of "wisdom". However, for Carloway, it seemed to prove true. The team who had looked like they were destined never to score, suddenly found the net three times in the opening twenty minutes of the second half as a Crossley/"Pongo"-inspired midfield now repeatedly set up wide men "Dokus" and "Tago" to cascade chance after chance on front men, "Gochan" and Macaulay.

Within a minute of the restart Macaulay was impeded on the left touchline, 22 metres from the bye-line, and Dan Crossley stepped up to outdo Martin Peters by sending the sweetest of right-foot free-kicks curling low inside the retreating defence where a charging "Pongo's" presence was enough to unsight Mackenzie and allow the ball to fly into the net inside the far-side left-hand post. On 54 minutes na Gormaich broke in numbers from midfield and 20 metres out "Tago" slipped the ball left to Macaulay on the edge of the line, marginally onside, and he carried it into the box to slip it under the advancing keeper from 16 metres.

Even the loss of "Tago" with a torn ligament did not stop the rush. On 65 minutes a carbon copy of the second goal saw another exquisite free-kick from Crossley met behind the defence by "Pongo" at the near post, this time to drive home from 6 metres. United were wobbling dangerously at this point as the Blues ran and ran at them. On 67 minutes a "Gochan" flick allowed "Dokus" to fire just past the right-hand post from 18 metres on the right. Ten minutes later "Gochan" broke fast on the left and his square cut 16 metres from the bye-line was dummied by Macaulay but "Sqweg's" drive was blocked

for a corner.

United were still competing hard but the lack of a dedicated experienced striker up front was glaringly obvious: on 77 minutes a shot flew past Beaton's left hand post, then a neat turn and shot from the substitute in 84 minutes curled away past the right, but it soon looked unlikely that they could salvage anything on the night.

Well. Carloway eventually got there, thanks to an exhilarating second half, though for the ninety minutes they approached the game in more or less the same way, positively. For forty minutes, however, they were in control but ineffective. For the next fifty, they bordered on rampant. Yet United didn't seem to become appreciably worse in the course of the game. True, even quality defenders like Liam Coleman and Tom Lawrence became too stretched and pressured to cope, and Calum Campbell and Steven Dunn were eventually overrun in midfield, but the nature of the key that changed the Blues' evening is difficult to define.

What unlocks the door? Luck? Simply, the law of averages? It is simply a matter of: *"do not weaken; the opposition will become tired and careless; the breakthrough will come"*. Several things are evident though: the presence of Scott Macaulay, his style and positioning, is big trouble for opposition defences. It supports "Gochan", and releases him to move wide, run, etc. If "Dokus" and "Tago" stay wide, not too deep, and they receive the ball in front of them - hopefully from one of Dan Crossley's Jimmy McIlroy specials, they metamorphose into Peter Marinello and Ian Callaghan. Add to this the presence of a Makalele/Essien figure in "Pongo" to front the defence; and, beside the Gneissian colossus of Domhnall Mackay, the arrival of Gus Maciver in central defence (a *"Go to meet the ball"* fury who is not afraid of the ball or any attacker), and the project appears to be currently on-message.

United Man of the Match: Steven Dunn.

Carloway Man of the Match: Dan Crossley.