

Lewis and Harris League:

Point 0 (0) Carloway 2 (1)

Calum "Caley" Macleod 42
Scott Macaulay 67

At Garrabost.

Friday, 18.5.12.

Ref.: Stuart Macleod.

David Beaton

Seumas Macleod Domhnall Mackay(capt.) Gus Maciver Donald "D.I." MacIennan?
Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Dan Crossley? Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod Calum "Caley"
Macleod

Kevin "Gochan" Macleod Scott Macaulay

Subs.: Donnie Macphail (Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod) 82; Ali "Tolsta" Maciver (Calum "Caley" Macleod) 82.

Yellow cards: Dan Crossley 6; Donald "D.I." MacIennan 55.

Back to the windiest place on earth (or is that Fivepenny?) for the Blues as the treadmill continues in the relentless pursuit of League points. An unforgiving east nor-easterly howled throughout the first half, intermittently in the second, as a constant reminder that there are always three participants in any game at Garrabost.

On their last nightmare here, in the Moldova Lewis in August, a howling rain-spattered sou'-westerly drove Carloway into an early two-goal lead, before an unkind god resolved to send Domhnall Mackay to the dressing room early. An unlucky Rubhach penalty award was then converted, and the tie forthwith spun out of the Blues' control, helped on its way by the headed goal of the season from Calum "Caley" Mackay. Triumphs, like the earlier 5-2 League recovery or ground-breaking 2010 Coop penalty-shoot-out victory were swiftly forgotten.

A year on, only Domhall Mackay remained of that back line though the team retained their essential 4-4-2 formation. Calum "Caley" Macleod replaced the injured "Tago" on the left midfield/wing, with "Sqweg" starting for "Pongo". Like United last Monday, Point looked young, though Iain Mackenzie still featured in central defence, Andie Murray was up front, Daniel MacIennan in goal, and, surprisingly, the star-gifted playmaker, "Rab" Maciver, in central midfield. Nevertheless, Carloway's last three League visits had proved fruitful so the portents appeared positive as, once again, to repeat the mantra from last season, "Victory was essential".

For the first twenty minutes, Carloway struggled in the wind to establish a shape and pick up the Point men, and their own men. Point, perhaps more used to these unusual conditions, had a slight edge, forcing it forward, being that metre quicker to the ball and spreading faster, but lack of an overall method and gameplan, or inability to establish one, soon became apparent, and the lack of a potent goal threat gradually became evident.

Daniel MacIennan's eye was in, fortunately. On 12 minutes a wicked Dan Crossley corner on the left swung in and was palmed away under the bar for

another corner on the right, which was headed clear to the left, before being returned inwards to the crowded penalty area by "Dokus" for "Rab" Maciver to head back coolly to his keeper. On 14 minutes a "Sqweg" diagonal cross from 23 metres was caught by the wind and had to be flicked over by the keeper. The resultant Crossley corner was headed just past by "Gochan" from 12 metres centrally.

It was 33 minutes before Point finally looked dangerous, as a neat 1-2 set up Maciver running in on the left of the Carloway box but his neatly-placed shot from 14 metres went wide of Beaton's left-hand post. An immediate counter-attack saw "Caley" sweep the ball in from the left; "Dokus" just managed to get in front of his marker in front of goal 12 metres out, but his stab-shot flew just over. On 39 minutes "Dokus" outfoxed his marker again by cutting in from the right rather than down the line, but this time, from 20 metres, his left-foot shot cleared the bar.

What was that again about "Groundhog Day"? Just as this game was shaping up to be a convincing re-run of Monday's game against United at Goathill, with na Gormaich enjoying the lion's share of possession and territory but unable to score, the breakthrough dropped from the heavens. On 42 minutes a Dan Crossley corner - a continuing nightmare for Dan Maclennan in the conditions - was palmed clear, resulting in a second Crossley corner. This time the ball broke out from the pack, seemed to be touched on by another party, and fell to "Caley" in the centre, just on the edge of the box. He swung at it, didn't seem to hit it cleanly, but his right-foot shot was unsaveable, spinning high inside the keeper's left-hand post.

The standard Garrabost question now arose at half-time. Would the roles be reversed and the team under the cosh (wind) in the first half - in this case, Point - seize the initiative and drive forward, as the Blues had eventually done before half-time? The answer was, "Not really". If anything, Carloway were more effective in the second half than the first, as playing into a strong and unpredictable gale forced them to keep the ball on the ground and build forward, rather than Roger Hynd it down the park. Point, in turn, consistently overplayed the forward pass/cross/long ball, so that countless breaks were squandered as the ball ran away from everyone over David Beaton's bye-line.

Immediately another vicious Crossley corner had to be headed off the Rubhach line. On 54 minutes "Caley" sent in a free-kick from 22 metres, out on the left; "Gochan" headed it on, but it was just a metre too quick for the inrushing Crossley, 6 metres out.

What was that again about "Groundhog Day"? Point were running better, had more of the ball than in the first half, but still simply did not look dangerous. As Carloway established more and more of a grip in midfield, with Crossley and "Sqweg" starting to win and spread the ball more and more, Point's influential playmaker, Maciver, seemed to figure less and less and Andie Murray become more and more marginal. A striker who had been absolutely deadly versus the Blues in August now disappeared from sight, and Domhnall Mackay and Gus Maciver increasingly pushed from the back. However, the

Point young men at the back, brilliantly marshalled by the veteran, Mackenzie, proved resolute, until the 67th minute when the direct route delivered the clincher.

A bit of "Gochan" magic on the right touchline, around the halfway line, saw the striker twist and turn on the spot, disconcerting a group of markers unable to predict his next move. Difficult, when "Gochan" doesn't appear to know himself. The ball was dispatched square to Seumas Macleod coming forward who slipped it diagonally forward to his left beyond Iain Mackenzie to Scott Macaulay, a half-metre ahead of the stopper. Pace proved to be the central defence's Achilles heel. Macaulay took off, Mackenzie beside him, stride for stride, but that half-metre proved vital. Macaulay carried the ball into the box and as MacLennan came to meet him, slipped the ball under the unlucky keeper from 14 metres.

Judging from what came later, the game was settled. Point still competed hard, but continued to overhit and the chances still favoured na Gormaich. A minute later "Gochan" was blocked, then "Dokus", before Crossley shot just past on 74 minutes. On 78 minutes a Crossley free-kick, midway within the Point half, out on the left touchline, found Seumas Macleod 12 metres out in front of goal but MacLennan grasped his strike safely. A minute later a mazy "Dokus" run on the right saw his shot crash into MacLennan's left-hand side netting. Then, on 87 minutes, the best late chance fell to Ali "Tolsta" as a fast break on the left sent him clear on to the defence-splitter inside his marker. He carried the ball into the box, drew the keeper, but his carefully-placed right-foot slip from 14 metres on the left went well-wide of the far post.

From Carloway's point of view, this match had striking similarities to Monday night's fixture at Goathill, They eventually got there, thanks to an eye-popping strike and an inspired piece of individual aggression and chance-taking, though at times you would be forgiven for thinking that a goal would never materialize. As at Goathill, for the ninety minutes they showed an encouraging self-belief, apparently confident in their own ability to deliver - and they did. They doggedly approached the game positively. For forty minutes, again, they were in control but lacking that final killer touch. For the next fifty, they switched up a gear, but the clincher seemed destined to elude them.

Point resembled United: an excellent back line, Iain Mackenzie and his three young helpers; Alasdair Gillies was not missed. "Rab" Maciver continued to show his class in his space-making, distribution, and that curious Gascoigne-type ability to see the patterns of a game as if looking down on it from on high. And in Daniel MacLennan, an excellent, safe keeper. However, like United, only a bit of luck seemed likely to provide any threat up front. Perhaps it's Carloway's granite-like back four which are making oppositions look shot-shy.

Certainly, after the first ten minutes, gauging the ball in the wind, all four got their bearings, and were faultless from thereon. Even the much-changed midfield functioned positively, in a style more reminiscent of last season:

"Sqweg" in best David Hay mode, ball-winning, then providing, especially in the symbiotic understanding he has with "Dokus": winning the ball, looking up, then sending the diagonal inside or just over the left back to find the already breaking wing half/wingman; Crossley dogged as the rest in the tackle but with that fine touch, especially, increasingly, in dead ball Baggio form, which is developing into a regular match-winning skill.

The record book shows a Carloway victory; three points in the bank. You have to have been there to understand how hard-won such seemingly straightforward things are.

Point Man of the Match: "Rab" Maciver

Carloway Man of the Match: Gus Maciver.