

Lewis & Harris League:

Back 4 (1)

Fraser Macleod 5, 82

Ross Hall 65

Andrew "Mowgli" Macleod 80

Carloway 1 (1)

Kevin "Gochan" Macleod 11

At Col Uarach,

Friday, 20.7.12

Ref.: Robert Mackay

David Beaton

Andrew "Tago" Maciver Seumas Macleod Gus Maciver Donald "D.I." MacIennan

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Donnie Macphail Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Murdo "Squeg" Macleod

Dan Crossley

Kevin "Gochan" Macleod

Subs.: David "Cirbhig" Macleod (Dan Crossley) 45; Chris "Christy" Smith (Kevin "Gochan" Macleod) 90+1.

Yellow cards: Donald "D.I." MacIennan 67; Murdo "Squeg" Macleod 72.

Col Uarach - probably one of the last places on the island that a depleted squad wishes to visit, after Goathill and Sgoil nan Loch, the last of Carloway's least favourite venues in the League and, as usual, another defining moment in a League campaign was in prospect, unfortunately against an in-form Back. Defeat would terminate to the Blues' League ambitions, while simply a blow to Back's aspirations, best avoided, but not fatal.

Last season's "*Nightmare in Broadbay*", featuring Fraser (not Freddie) Macleod, had a decidedly unpleasant finale as, after competing valiantly for 74 minutes, na Gormaich sank faster than the Titanic in the last quarter-hour, courtesy of a four-goal execution from the young striker. The year before Frazmac had delighted in heaping equal misery on the Blues, thanks to a **96th** minute winner (!!!) in yet another contest when Carloway had looked as if maybe..... . Mind you, there have been isolated moments of joy - remember Kenny "Beag's" double strike winners in the 2009 encounter? - but these have been rarer than blue whales in the Minch.

Selection problems continued to dog Carloway: Scott Macaulay out for the season; Gordon "Tago" Macdonald and Calum Tom Moody still recovering; Andrew "Tago" Maciver (hamstring perhaps) and Dan Crossley (knee?) but both available, as was the recovered Donald "D.I." MacIennan. In the reciprocal fixture in May, the Blues had played a bold card by playing "Pongo" in the Makalele/Essien role, with Gus Macleod and Domhnall Mackay as stoppers and Seumas Macleod on the right. Tonight this was rejigged with Mackay forward, the Macleods behind, and Maciver right. "Dokus" and Crossley were the right and left outriders; "Gochan" a lone striker. Carloway were delighted to hear Kevin "Bloxy" Murray, another *bête noir*, was unfit, so Colin Maclean started up front alongside Macleod, Martin slightly behind. Ross Hall mirrored Mackay, in front of Jason Macleod and David "Ox" Macleod, flanked by Andrew "Mowgli" Macleod and Murdo "Gress" MacIennan, no D.J. Macdonald or Murray Macleod.

No explosive opening, decidedly low-key sparring, although "Tohan"(who was to have a Lev Yashin first half) had to move smartly to tip a "Dokus" drive

from 20 metres over a couple of minutes in. Then, out of nothing, a simple opener, though well-taken. A speculative Martin Maclean effort from 22 metres centrally, not that well-struck but placed low to the diving Beaton's right hand, came back inwards off the inside of the post and Fraser Macleod - who else? - was first to react to bundle the ball forward, then convert clinically from 10 metres.

Immediately Carloway broke down the right; "Gochan" cut in and from the right of the box lifted a looping lob/shot over "Tohan" on to the far side of the top of the bar. Carloway started to function now. After 10 minutes, Crossley beat two opponents on the left but as he moved into the box, he was crowded out and the ball cleared for a corner. The corner came in from the left and was headed out leftwards, to be gathered again by Crossley, to fire back in one of his dipping Martin Peters specials over the advancing back-line to the far post where "Gochan" came in at speed to meet it on the volley 8 metres out. "Tohan", miraculously, got his left hand/side to it but its power drove it home. A beauty!

Carloway now had a clear edge: the Mackay ploy was functioning well, blocking out the industry and creativity of Martin Maclean, hence isolating his namesake Colin and Frazmac; the running of "Gochan" and ingenuity of Crossley, their pace also, were testing "Gress" and "Mowgli"; Hall was drawn back but, in the middle, Jason Macleod and he remained steadfast. The fly in the Blues' ointment was: who was to score the goals that "Gochan" and Crossley" set up the chances for? Back seemed content to drift back and hold a crowded line awaiting the main chance. An in-form goalkeeper also denied na Gormaich repeatedly.

On 14 minutes another Crossley run on the left saw him supply "Dokus" on the right edge of the box, but his turn and drive were tipped over expertly by "Tohan". Six minutes later, "Gochan" eluded "Gress", then turned in, but his shot from 20 metres was flicked over by the keeper. On 25 minutes a "Dokus" break on the right, then cross, saw the keeper beat "Gochan's" head to the ball for a clear header from 10 metres, to knock away for a corner. Again Macleod reacted brilliantly to deny Mackay from 16 metres as the ball broke outwards from the corner. On 34 minutes a Macphail drive from 20 metres cleared the bar, before a heart-stopping moment for the Blues: in a rare Back attack "Mowgli" got to the right bye-line and his low cross came to Fraser Macleod 6 metres out to the left side of goal but he uncharacteristically mistimed his swing and the ball bounced away harmlessly.

On 39 minutes a Crossley cross was headed just over from 12 metres by "Gochan" before Carloway ended the half with a succession of corners. "Tohan" came out for the third but his attempted punch clear seemed instead to help the ball onwards and inwards before an acrobatic overhead kick cleared in front of the line.

The thoughts of the Carloway squad at the interval must have been mixed: what's the old adage about what happens if you don't take your chances when you are in the ascendancy? It was hard to believe that the Bacachs

would allow Carloway to continue to dictate play for another 45 minutes. In effect, the fickle Lady Fortune gave them a helping hand by the withdrawal of Carloway's main provider, Crossley; David Macleod deputised. "Pongo" seemed to be suffering slightly also in the second. Another question was how long could "Gochan" keep up his all-action contribution? A whack on his right cheekbone midway through the half didn't help either. The game certainly changed inexorably throughout the second half. On 52 minutes a "Dokus" run and shot from 22 metres was held comfortably by Macleod but Carloway seemed to have lost their cohesive force, and were now depending on individual flashes of inspiration up front, from "Dokus" and "Gochan".

As on Monday versus Harris, the midfield disappeared as a unit. To compensate, the back-line pushed high; Mackay drove forward more, but declining fire-power in central attack left Back comfortable. A disheartened "Gochan" was tiring. The Back strategy now seemed to be: let them run at us; let them pretend they are Spain at the back and in the middle; defend *en masse*; they'll give it away; Hall and Maclean will deliver the golden breaks for Fraser. After all, he now had a clear 30 metres to outrun the Macleods, or only one man to beat to be through on Beaton. On 55 minutes a predictable mix-up in defence saw the ball break to Frazmac 16 metres out on the left but he pulled his low shot just outside Beaton's left-hand post.

As Carloway's star was sinking, Back's rose. On 63 minutes a free-kick out on the left, 24 metres from goal, was nodded tamely into the keeper's arms by Macleod. On 63 minutes came the inevitable moment: the classic break out of defence by the Bacachs, which witnessed a breaking Martin Maclean, on the halfway line, send a glorious defence-splitter to the charging Hall, to outpace his markers, veer slightly right, and send an oh-so-cool Jimmy Greaves cracker into the opposite corner of the net. Pure class!

There was no way back for Carloway. David Macleod moved to right-back; "Pongo" into central attack. Weight/power was needed up front to assist the tireless "Gochan", but to no effect. Carloway continued to pass the ball around, push and run, but without real threat; in fact, Back looked more dangerous when they broke. On 77 minutes a run by Derek Macleod took him to the bye-line to David Beaton's right, but he lost control. Three minutes later the fans could make their way home: a corner on the left carried over the central pack to "Mowgli" at the far post to bang home from 6 metres. And just when the Blues thought their misery was complete, another centrally placed defence-splitter, threaded between the Macleods saw Fraser speeding through like a bullet train to slip past a helpless Beaton from the edge of the box.

So, once again, in the League anyway, Carloway reap the thorn, not the fir; the brier, not the myrtle. No smooth stones in the stream for them. Yet after the dodgy opening two games of 2012, it had all seemed so promising for the Blues as silverware glinted on yonder horizon: are "Tago", Dan, and Scott so fundamental to success? Certainly they all bring different qualities to the side: "Tago's" clever wing-play; his dead-ball expertise, shared by Crossley whose additional pace, insight, and distribution renders him invaluable; the weight,

power, and sheer doggedness of Macaulay on the ball. He cannot be ignored.

Perhaps more direct tactics are necessary; no team should be decried for attempting to play careful, controlled football, on the ground, from the back, but this assisted Back tonight, as it did Athletic twice earlier this season, two sides with solid, experienced, well-organised back-lines, to have time to prepare for an expected onslaught; insightful passing experts in midfield in Martin Maclean, Ross Hall, Nic Davis; and deadly pacy strikers in Scott Maciver and Fraser Macleod.

Apart from a tricky last quarter of the first half, when a magical spell from "Tohan" kept them alive, the Bacachs strolled through this contest; in the last half-hour Jason, "Ox", and "Tohan" were probably able to keep their fan-bases up to date on Twitter, as Ross Hall and Martin Maclean entertained the crowd. *Quo vadis* then, the Blues? Three cups left. EaF can take care of itself. A time for young men to shine in the remaining League games: Calum Iain "Dunan" Macleod; David "Cirbhig" Macleod; Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur; who else? And save the heavy artillery for the Moldova Lewis and Coop Cups? Desperate times perhaps demand desperate measures, before another season vanishes into the history books.

[Back](#) Man of the Match: Iain "Tohan" Macleod.

[Carloway](#) Man of the Match: Kevin "Gochan" Macleod.