

Lewis and Harris League:

Ness 3 (1)

Andrew "Bubble" Macleod 5
Craig Harris 70
Kenny "Parry" Macleod 82

Carloway 1 (0)

Kevin "Gochan" Macleod 63

At Fivepenny.

Monday, 3.9.12.

Ref.: Robert Mackay.

David Beaton

Calum Iain Macleod Calum Tom Moody Gus Maciver Donald "D.I." MacIennan
David "Cìrbhig" Macleod Donnie Macphail Andrew "V.P." Macleod Andrew "Tago" Maciver
Dan Crossley

Kevin "Gochan" Macleod (capt.)

Subs.: Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur (Donald "D.I." MacIennan) 45; Ben Smith (Dan Crossley) 60; Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod (Andrew "V.P." Macleod) 62.

Carloway most likely were thankful that this was the final fixture in their stuttering League campaign, which had begun in misery at Cnoc a' Choilich last April, with a misfiring 0-1 defeat to Lochs, picked up with four straight victories, then swiftly disappeared down the tubes with defeats at Goathill to Athletic, 2-3, and at Leurbost, 1-2; not to mention a stultifying draw in Tarbert in what was to be the Hearachs only point of the season. A brief glimmer on the horizon came with another three wins, before a 1-4 mauling at Col Uarach finally sent the boat out. In Seasons 2010 and 2011 it was na Gormaich's League campaigns which had been inspirational, in a landscape strewn with Cup débâcles; not so, in 2012.

So, between two rather more important matches, a minor irritant of a fixture no one in blue really cared overmuch about, perhaps evidenced by the line-up and the play, at times, later on. The no-show list was, once more, as long as one's arm: Domhnall Mackay (ankle injury); Seumas Macleod (ankle); Darren Mackinnon (army leave over?); Billy Anderson, Kevin "Barra" Macneil, Ali "Tolsta" Maciver, and Jamie Macdonald unavailable; and Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald (fitness) kept safe on the bench till required.

Wisely, some young players were blooded further: Calum Iain "Doune" Macleod at right-back, with David "Cìrbhig" Macleod in front of him; Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur and Ben Smith advised of a second half entry. Others not used on Friday figured: Andrew "V.P." Macleod (who did so well last Wednesday versus United in the Moldova SF, reprised his role as holding midfielder, while Donnie Macphail was preferred in midfield to Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod, who dropped to substitute; Andrew "Tago" Maciver returned from England beside Macphail. No Kevin Anderson or Graeme "Windy" Miller either, nor Chris Macdonald.

Thankfully two mantras have bit the dust this season, boring in their repetitiveness: "*Ness haven't beaten Carloway since* ", and "*Carloway have not won any silverware since* ". Honours were even: in June, the Blues, gearing up for a JS Final appearance, were dumped here 1-2 by the

Niseachs, whom they trounced 6-0 three weeks later in a Home League fixture. A fortnight later the Greens spoiled the party at Cnoc a' Choilich, 2-1, in the EaF SF (1), then were thrown out 4-1, 5-3 on aggregate, in the second leg at Fivepenny, in a tie which hung in the balance till the 74th minute.

Another feature of that 4-1 game had been the weather: mild, sunny, and WINDLESS! No such luck tonight: a howling crosswise sou'westerly threatened to carry both shelters to the Faeroes as both sides battled unsuccessfully to control the ball in wind and on a wet surface. An electrifying Crossley run on four minutes down the left touchline, followed by a tricky turn up the byeline, saw the unsupported winger crowded out to the left of goal. Then "Bubble" handed na Gormaich his customary welcome to Fivepenny. A swift move broke into the centre-right of the Carloway half, then, as the Blues' back-line was dragged leftwards, was switched to Macleod breaking off his marker, running out wide into the left corner of the box. Beaton came out like a flash but before he could compose his block, "Bubble" stabbed an early low shot just inside his right-hand post. Beautifully-taken! (0-1)

Lack of close control, from both sides, led to an opening twenty minutes of lost balls, misplaced passes, and overhit long balls, leaving both keepers relatively idle. On 20 minutes, a Gus Maciver break through the middle, out of his own half, led to a pass picking out "Gochan", 20 metres out to the left of goal, but his near post drive whizzed a metre past "Sweeney's" right-hand post. Five minutes it was "Titch" Morrison's turn to hit a low drive from 25 metres centrally, but it went straight to Beaton. Another chance came for "Gochan" on the half-hour when "Pongo" powered through the middle, moved left, then slipped the ball to him, to run rightwards along the edge of the box, take his time, then fire a careful right-foot shot to "Sweeney's" left, but the keeper held it confidently under his bar.

Ness replied down their right; Micheil Smith found a window moving forward into the right-side of the Blues' half, but his shot from 22 metres took a nasty deflection high to Beaton's right. Two minutes later came Carloway's best chance so far. Crossley escaped once more on a mazy run down the left, cut in at the bye-line, then slipped the ball back to "Gochan", 16 metres out to the left of goal, but again his right-foot strike went at high speed past "Sweeney's" right-hand post. On the whistle, "Pongo" received the ball in the centre in the Niseach half, but his shot from 22 metres, which soared off into the moors of Sutherland, perfectly summed up most of the efforts of the first half.

Half-time: Ness 0 Carloway 0.

Another injury was added to the list, with "Tiger" replacing "D.I." Otherwise, more of the same, unfortunately. Na Gormaich tried to force the pace, but an invisible midfield, an absence of any shape or cohesion, and a failure in close control was defeating them. An immediate break down the left saw the low cross just beat "Pongo" on the right, 16 metres out. Then, on 53 minutes, a blistering run on to a long ball from midfield saw "Gochan" outpace Taylor and "Parry" to run in goal from the right. He got to 12 metres out, tried to outguess "Sweeney" by turning in to the keeper's right across goal, but "Sweeney" read

him and got down to make a brilliant flick of the ball off the striker's toes.

With nothing being created, Domhnall Mackay, tonight's supremo, bit the bullet: a double substitution of Smith and "Sqweg"; to safeguard Crossley for Friday, and for "V.P.", to become more aggressive in formation and energize the midfield. Immediately "Sqweg" achieved what he had been put there for, an insightful defence-splitter from the right centre-line inside Taylor for "Tago" to run on to; an early ball into the centre found "Gochan" ghosting in front of the stoppers to stab a low right-foot shot past a helpless "Sweeney" inside the keeper's left-hand post. (1-1).

"Sqweg" added extra thought - and presence - to the midfield, Ben Smith extra pace up front, but still shape was absent. Faced with solid, zonal marking, unlike the man-marking of Back on Saturday, Carloway were flummoxed, and the fiddle-faddle started, across the line: Maciver - Moody - Macarthur - Moody - Macphail - Maciver - Moody; people retreating, facing their own goal; the distance to "Sweeney" ever greater; the pass-back to Beaton; the boot downfield; Ness on the ball.

On 70 minutes a Carloway attack broke down on the edge of the box and the ball was played early - a style of play unused by the Blues tonight - through the middle; a clever turn on the ball from "Bubble"(?) to play the ball left to Craig Harris on the edge of the box. He immediately stepped right of Calum Iain "Doune" and lifted a ball high to Beaton's left which benefitted from the slightest of deflections to carry through the keeper's fingertips and into the far top corner of the net. No elaboration; no playing back; simplicity itself! (1-2).

Moody responded with a glorious diagonal forward to the left through the line to "Gochan" running free to the bye-line but his squared low cross 8 metres from the bye-line was too strong for the arriving Smith to reach. On 76 minutes "Gochan" returned the favour when a Macphail corner on the left was poorly headed out leftwards but his cut-back was lifted past "Sweeney's" right-hand post by Moody from 14 metres in the centre. Beaton then had to move sharply to tip a long-rang effort out of midfield over his bar. Na Gormaich's final clear chance came on 81 minutes when Macphail played a short corner on the right to "Sqweg" to chip in from right edge of the box but the attempted connect was deflected wide of the keeper's right-hand post. Moments later, everyone could go home, as Carloway lost the ball on the edge of the Ness box - where else? - and the long ball downfield was controlled on the right of the Blues' box, played across to "Parry", and his low strike from 20 metres took a nasty deflection to enter the net, low to David Beaton's left. (1-3).

Full-time: Ness 3 Carloway 1.

A night to forget, down Carloway way, with a desultory, unfocussed display, characterized by over-elaboration, lack of leadership (except at the back from Gus Maciver), and dither, punished mercilessly by a patient, organized, and direct opposition, not forgetting a class act in Andrew Macleod. Well, at least the pies are good!

How much should be read into tonight's performance? On the plus side, the young "*débutants*" performed admirably. Calum Iain "Doune's" solid display demonstrated that he could slot in perfectly next season at right back, while "Cìrbhig", after an initial peripheral half-hour off the pace, improved hugely. Similarly with the two young substitutes, though Ben Smith suffered from lack of ammunition. This evening also demonstrated how vital certain players appear to be to Carloway success, with the lack of steel and drive from Mackay in midfield, coupled with the power, tackling, and imaginative playmaking from Billy Anderson. "Gochan" and Crossley had too much to do up front, lacking support through the middle, and missing the pace of "Dokus" down the right, yet, typically, ran and ran, though achieved little, being unsupported, then surrounded or pressured into snatched finishing.

Ness Man of the Match: Andrew "Bubble" Macleod.

Carloway Man of the Match: Gus Maciver.