

Lewis and Harris League:

## Lochs 1 (0) Carloway 5 (2)

David Martin 63

Kevin "Gochan" Macleod 13, 90+1

Calum Tom Moody 32

Dan Crossley 48

Seumas Macleod 81

At Sgoil nan Loch.

Monday, 6.5.13.

Ref.: George Macaskill.

David Beaton

Calum Tom Moody Gus Maciver Donald "D.I." MacIennan

Seumas Macleod Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Billy Anderson Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod Dan Crossley

Kevin "Gochan" Macleod Fraser Macleod

Subs.: Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald (Billy Anderson) 5; Scott Macaulay (Fraser Macleod) 58; Kevin "Barra" Macneil (Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald) 83.

Subs. not used: Craig Hacker; Colin Maclean.

Carloway once looked on a visit to Cameron Terrace as an opportunity to provide target practice for the Maroons, in much the same way that East Stirlingshire or Montrose regarded a journey to Ibrox or Parkhead. At least the first two would make some money out of their drubbings; the Blues would just receive the thrashing. Over the years League results tightened, though Cup maulings persisted; 2-5 in the ABC in 2004; 1-6 in the same Cup the following year, plus 0-9 in the EaF; in 2006, 3-5 in the JS and 2-6 in the HAC; 0-4 in 2007 in the JS and 2-8 in the EaF; 1-5 in the Lewis in 2008; and the nadir, 0-9 in the Coop and 0-7 in the JS in 2009.

So, a lot of anguish there, but a turning-point finally arrived, with the great Lochs side reaching its peak *circa* 2011, just as na Gormaich graduated from village green lads to serious contenders and *actually* started competing with Lochs, even beating them. However, last season's confrontations against Lochs had brought mixed fortune: opening day misery at Cnoc a' Choilich for the Blues, a 0-1 League reverse, followed in May, by a stormy 2-0 victory over the then Jock Stein Cup holders; then, despite the Blues dominating a return League visit to Leurbost in June, the Maroons surged to a late 2-1 triumph, with ex-Carloway stalwart, Gordon Craigie, notching the winner. Their 2012 contests concluded with two explosive Cup encounters at Cnoc a' Choilich in August, the Blues edging a 2-0 Coop victory, then triumphing once more, 4-1, in a red-blooded (and red-carded) Moldova Lewis "battle".

Their earlier League meeting this season, at Cnoc a' Choilich, had witnessed another tightly-contested affair between two contrasting strategies: a neat, forward-moving, but slow-passing Lochs approach against a careful build-up from a powerful Carloway, but sudden, fast delivery diagonally or over to pacy strikers. Ultimately Carloway's superior fire-power, 4-1, prevailed, despite suffering from another regular feature of these encounters: dismissals. That night, it was the turns of Domhnall Mackay and Kevin "Gochan" Macleod; last August, Graeme Mackenzie and Angie Campbell were invited to leave; in May, Andrew "Tago" Maciver. The boys obviously take these games seriously!

Tonight, questions of fitness (and, no doubt Friday night's ABC Final) saw Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald and Scott Macaulay join Craig Hacker, Kevin "Barra" Macneil, and Colin Maclean on the bench, and Kevin "Gochan" Macleod and Fraser Macleod starting up front. Some of the "Greats" still faced them: Peter Mackenzie on the right flank; Graeme Mackenzie at central stopper, joined by David Macmillan, it seemed, in the unfamiliar role of sweeper(?). Perennial pain-in-the-neck, Donald "Nomie" Macdonald, roamed around up front; and there was a welcome rare appearance on the left from David Martin, arguably the greatest left-half/wing on the island in the modern era.

Thankfully, the evening, though dull later on, was windless. The players could play football with a ball, not a balloon. The match began predictably, each side respecting the opposition, passing it around, retaining possession - and territory; being ultra-careful. An initial blow for the Blues was the departure of playmaker, Billy Anderson, with hamstringing problems, but substitute "Dokus" made his presence effective very soon, moving on to a lovely forward pass down the right and relaying it swiftly ahead of him to Fraser Macleod, who, in turn, swept it in immediately for "Gochan" breaking in the centre behind the retreating defence; but his right-foot stab from 20 metres shot wide of Iain Gillies's right-hand post.

The opener was only delayed 5 minutes, courtesy of Monty Python's "*Ministry of Silly Goals*". A beautifully-flighted "Dokus" free-kick out on the right from 24 metres was met by a cloud of heads, 10 metres in front of Gillies. It spun up towards his right bye-line. Two Lochies followed it, lost it in the air, and it dropped down, hit one of them on the back and bounced back. The lurking "Gochan", to the left of goal, couldn't believe his luck and stabbed it home high into the net (**0-1**). Ouch!

Lochs were obviously rattled and the Blues took advantage: on 15 minutes Seumas Macleod got behind Chris Mackay on the right and squared fast from 12 metres, but a brilliant sliding interception from Peter Mackenzie cleared the danger. A minute later Fraser Macleod was sent clear towards the box on the left but a sprinting Gillies won the race to the ball to boot clear. Eventually, Lochs threatened: on 21 minutes an inviting "Nomie" free-kick from the left edge of the box was headed clear from a cluster of bodies, but immediately a flowing move down the right allowed Dan Crossley to fire over from 24 metres. Then in quick succession, around the half-hour, "Dokus" shot over from the same distance, before seeing his corner on the right headed over by Moody from 14 metres centrally; next, a speculative drive from "Sqweg" cleared the bar from 22 metres.

Lochs were not creating danger, even though Carloway retreated *en masse* when the Maroons had possession. David Macmillan seemed wasted so deep; the midfield lacked imagination unless he pushed up and supported Angie Campbell; and any time the ball did come forward, lack of a convincing target man meant the ball was forfeited too easily to the Blues. "Nomie" couldn't do everything; Martin was neglected for long periods on the left. At the slightest whiff of a threat the Blues adopted a *catennacio* approach Herrera would have been proud of, with Maciver as general, patrolling/ cajoling/ clearing, as second-sweeper.

Then, on 34 minutes, another simple goal: a "Dokus" corner on the left was met by Fraser Macleod's head, under pressure, to come across backwards to Moody on the right of goal, 10 metres out, and he headed down to Gillies's right and inside the goal-post full-back (**0-2**).

The balance of play was inexorably favouring Carloway. An instant break by "Gochan" on the left saw his high diagonal met by the unmarked Fraz Mac's head, 12 metres from goal, but the keeper somehow managed to block with his legs. Two minutes later Fraser Macleod robbed Graeme Mackenzie just inside the Lochs half on the right, moved in at speed on the right but Macmillan managed to get his foot to his low cross to divert away for a corner. Finally, on 39 minutes, an opportunity for the Maroons: "Nomie" managed to win the ball on the left, midway within the Blues half, wall-passed to Macmillan, then raced on into the box, but Beaton anticipated his drive at the near post from 16 metres.

**Half-Time: Lochs 0 Carloway 2**

Whatever solutions were discussed in the Lochs dressing-room at the break were rendered invalid right away. On 48 minutes "Gochan" was sent clear down the right and 18 metres from the bye-line sent the sweetest of high squared crosses for Crossley to meet with his head in

front of goal and glance in off Gillies's right-hand post (**0-3**).

There is no such phrase as "*damage limitation*" in island football. Lochs felt compelled to chase the game, leaving huge gaps at the back. Three minutes later Fraz Mac once more released "Gochan" through the middle but Gillies reacted well to block and hold his low drive from 20 metres. Lochs retaliated on 52 minutes when a Macmillan free-kick from 22 metres on the left of the box was diverted for a corner by "D.I."; then another from "Nomie" on the right, 14 metres from the bye-line broke square across goal to Macmillan at the far post, but Beaton beat his straight drive away.

On the hour Macaulay was sent clear through the middle by a glorious diagonal behind the line from "Gochan", out on the right, but Gillies rushed out to make a brilliant defence block with his left hand, 16 metres from goal. A Seumas Macleod drive just over from 16 metres on the hour preceded a ray of hope appearing for the Maroons. A breaking Peter Mackenzie succeeded in sending a high cross from the right, 18 metres from the bye-line, to the far post, where the ball broke down to Martin, 10 metres out. He took one step in, then sent a rising right-foot rasper in, which was sharply deflected to Beaton's right. (**1-3**).

However, try as they may, Lochs were unable to press, as the pace of the Carloway breaks, especially on the wings, supplying powerful strikers, continually tested. This in turn kept Macmillan deep; Campbell isolated. On 67 minutes a speculative low drive from Moody, 24 metres from goal was carefully held by Gillies. Macmillan also shot over from 24 metres, before a mazy Crossley run down the left set up "Dokus" on the edge of the box but his drive went wide of Gillies's right-hand post.

With 15 minutes left, a Macmillan free-kick on the right, 20 metres from the line, led to a stamash in the Carloway box, before being booted clear for a corner on Beaton's right. The resulting corner was met by a Lochs head at the near post, 12 metres out, but somehow the downward header was flicked over the bar by an instinctive swipe from Crossley. A minute later "Sqweg" was sent clear through the middle but, one-on-one, from 18 metres he chipped the ball over Gillies - and the bar. Then Macaulay won a tussle with Peter Mackenzie in the centre, inside the area 16 metres out, turned and hooked, but Gillies read him well to snatch the ball high to his left.

Finally, on 81 minutes, a stunning strike settled the night. A disputed free-kick was awarded on the right-hand edge of the Lochs box, and while Moody and Campbell gave each other their thoughts thereon, "Sqweg" slipped the ball intelligently to Seumas Macleod, wide and unmarked. He moved forwards, turned in, and sent a pile-driver just inside the near post from 16 metres, the weight of the ball too heavy for Gillies to keep out (**1-4**).

Five minutes later Macaulay sent a defence-splitter forward from the halfway line, which "Gochan" sped on to like an express train. He drew the keeper, whizzed to his left, then cut the ball goalwards, only for a covering defender to race and block for a corner, from which Seumas Macleod blazed just over from 16 metres. In added-on time, the irrepressible "Gochan" charged once more down the right, this time off a Maciver breaker, carried to the right edge of the box, then sent a low drive across Gillies into the far corner (**1-5**).

**Half-Time: Lochs 1 Carloway 5**

The score-line reflects an insatiable competition for position on the scoring pecking order at Cnoc a' Choilich, between Fraz Mac, "Gochan", "Dokus", Macaulay, and Crossley. Even without Billy Anderson, the golden defence-splitters still came, time after time. The main difference between the sides was, as in the earlier League game, strike capability. Lochs were weakest on the left, increasingly later on through the centre and on the right too, as David Macmillan and

Peter Mackenzie pushed forward repeatedly to support Angie Campbell and energise a lacklustre midfield and non-existent strike force. "Nomie" roamed and roamed; David Martin searched and searched; but nothing concerted occurred in any continuous way. Therefore, as the game progressed, na Gormaich simply had to let Lochs come at them, bide their time, then break at pace and stretch wide.

At times, "Gochan" was unstoppable; Scott Macaulay impossible to get off the ball; Dan Crossley roamed at will, and when he pulled wide, Seumas Macleod was released, relatively untroubled, up the right. The Mackenzies couldn't cover all their bases. And even if "Nomie" unlocked the door to David Beaton, no one was waiting to enter, and anyone who did try was swatted by Gus Maciver and "D.I.". So, a confident display by the Blues, who only doubted themselves once, for a brief period, after David Martin's goal; then they went on to exhaust the opposition with chance after chance.

**Lochs Man of the Match: David Macmillan.**

**Carloway Man of the Match: Kevin "Gochan" Macleod.**