

Lewis and Harris League:

United 0 (0) Carloway 4 (2)

*Fraser Macleod 31, 49
Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald 43
Own Goal (James Feeney) 76*

*At Goathill Park, Stornoway.
Monday, 5.8.13.
Ref.: David "Spider" Macleod.*

*David Beaton
Calum Tom Moody Gus Maciver Donald "D.I." MacIennan
Seumas Macleod Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Murdo "Sqweg"
Macleod Dan Crossley
Scott Macaulay Fraser Macleod*

*Subs.: Billy Anderson (Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald) 60; Andrew "Tago" Maciver (Fraser Macleod) 72; Kevin "Barra" Macneil (Scott Macaulay) 81.
Subs. not used: Colin Maclean; Ben Smith.*

After Coop joy in Benbecula, then misery - and elimination - last Monday to Lochs, Carloway returned to Goathill - the scene earlier this season of ABC and Jock Stein Cup glory. A rather urgent pursuit lay ahead: three League points in order to remain a leading title contender beside Athletic, both slightly ahead of West Side, knowing full well that the Siarachs could radically alter whose name might finally appear on the trophy by beating both Athletic at Barvas in their conveniently-postponed fixture, and the Blues at the same venue a week on Friday. Judging by Friday night's demolition of the Maroons in the EaF, victory would appear a feat that is easily within West's capabilities.

Tonight the hosts were United, to whom the Blues have lately passed on the dreaded mantra,"----- *haven't won a trophy since -----*"; in United's case, 1976, in the Lewis Cup. On an earlier League meeting this season, on a windy, sodden May evening at Cnoc a' Choilich, "Gordy" Mackenzie had a less than enjoyable experience, recovering the ball from his net regularly in a 1-7 drubbing, as final man in a Wasps' XI whose only non-teenagers on the night were "Gordie", James Feeney, Kenneth Maclean, Kevin Macmillan, and Norman Macleod. Na Gormaich's last two League visits to Goathill to confront United have also been fruitful, 4-1 last season, 2-0 in 2011, partially helping to erase dark memories of the previous season's nightmare (the most fitting term), when "Gochan" saw red and the ball saw the back of the Blues' net **EIGHT** times. Ouch! The Carloway defenders that night no doubt woke up screaming in the night throughout the following winter.

Hopefully, a similar débacle was not looming, although the Coop defeat to Lochs demonstrated how crucial team selection was now in the League run-in, and how influential the presence of certain squad members was. On 29th July the second-half introduction of July Player of the Month, Dan Crossley, and June Player of the Month, Scott Macaulay, had soon produced the desired effect, and who knows what the final result might have been if it had not been for the loss of an immediate third goal or the unexpected early departure of "Gochan".

Tonight, both started though Kevin "Gochan" Macleod and Kenny "Beag" Macleannan were not available; Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald moved back to right midfield, so Billy Anderson remained on the bench, alongside the recovered Kevin "Barra" Macneil and former stalwart, Andrew "Tago" Maciver, on the island for the captain's wedding on Friday; emerging star, Ben Smith, and Colin Maclean also featured. Gordon Macleannan finally returned from injury for United, on the right of attack, while his brother Jack featured between the sticks, with Stephen Kettings in central midfield; but again the Wasps had a generally under-20 look about them.

If the fans were hoping for a reasonably calm, untroubled evening after the stormy controversies and goal blitzes of the past few weeks, the Good Fairy certainly granted their wish. Despite efforts of all on the field, the first half-hour was as fast-moving as a fishing competition, as a wary Wasps failed to make any impression in the last third, and the Blues struggled to energize themselves to play at anything other than a leisurely La Liga pace, dropping back *en masse* whenever the ball was lost - as it was repeatedly - and surrendering the first third of their half in order to line their 18-metre line and flood the box. The usual corollary of this style, so effective in both Athletic games, is for na Gormaich to win the ball eventually, then suddenly break at full speed, employing the de Boer: the high diagonal or over the mid-defence's heads, for Seumas Macleod right, Dan Crossley left, and Fraser Macleod or "Dokus" wherever they lie, to outpace at speed.

However, this chapter on long balls appeared to have been erased from the manual and the favoured approach appeared to be Europa-style short ball passing out of defence, back and forth across the middle and back, and tentative build-ups, allowing United to regroup and consolidate. Scott Macaulay was abandoning the third quarter in favour of the left centre-line, and breaking from deep, but ball control generally was initially careless for all concerned and a scrappy opening period lengthened.

Eventually, in 10 minutes a fast break on the left saw Macaulay carry the ball to the bye-line but his low square cross seemed to shoot between Macleannan, Seumas Macleod, and Feeney at the near post and carry across the face of the goal untouched. Three minutes later it was Fraz Mac's turn to get behind the line, picking up a long ball right, then carrying it into the right corner of the box, but his low strike from an acute angle was carefully blocked and held by Macleannan at the base of his left-hand post.

United briefly threatened after 25 minutes when a Macmillan free-kick, 22 metres out directly in front of goal, was fired a metre wide of Beaton's left-hand post. Immediately, Fraz Mac was sent clear on the left. Macleannan raced out to block his piledriver from 20 metres on the left edge of the box, but the ball spun out to "Dokus" 16 metres out in front of goal. Unaware of the unmarked Seumas Macleod to his right, he turned left but his shot was too weak to beat the recovering goalkeeper.

Two minutes later, a "Sqweg" free-kick out on the left touchline, midway within the Wasps' half, was met by Fraser Macleod, 10 metres out to the left of goal. His looping header smacked the right of the bar, then dropped rightwards before being half-volleyed back across goal, for the rushing Seumas Macleod, 10 metres out, to thump at full tilt and narrowly miss a flock of geese passing overhead.

On 31 minutes the Blues finally registered with a trademark move: United lost the ball on the right edge of the Carloway box, and the ball was moved forward to the breaking "Dokus" to lift high onwards to Seumas Macleod to race off his marker into the right of the box. 14 metres from the bye-line, he judged his low, squared cross perfectly to beat the retreating Feeney and reach the lurking Fraz Mac by the far post to side-foot home (**0-1**).

Suddenly the engine was firing. Two minutes later, a clearance from defence was met by Macaulay in the centre circle to head on backwards for Fraser Macleod to carry to the left edge of the United box, but his parting shot went straight to the keeper. United had to make do with a long-range effort, after 41 minutes, from 24 metres outside the left corner of the box, but it went straight to Beaton. A minute later and Fraz Mac was clear again through the centre but again MacIennan was out like lightning, to second-guess his flick from the edge of the box brilliantly and block and smother.

However, a minute later Macleod turned provider to release "Dokus" into the left of the United box. This time, as MacIennan rushed out, "Dokus" lifted it neatly over him to let it drop slowly into the far corner of the net (**0-2**).

Half-time: United 0 Carloway 2

Kevin Anderson had evidently arranged for Sam Allardyce to speak to his side at half-time, as Carloway soon appeared to have metamorphosed from Barcelona into Bolton Wanderers in the space of 10 minutes, with a touch of Wimbledon thrown in. Immediately Jack MacIennan had to race from goal to boot clear from the advancing Fraser Macleod. Then, on 49 minutes, "D.I." won the ball deep in his own half on the right, came forward and played it on to Macaulay just inside the United half, and he in turn flicked it over his marker for "Fraz Mac" to once more burst beyond his shadow and, from just inside the right of the Wasps' box, lift the ball over the approaching keeper and inside the far post (**0-3**).

The strategy was clear: Seumas Macleod and Macaulay to break fast and wide, right and left; "Dokus" and "Fraz Mac" wherever they could; no more of this *totaalvoetbal* nonsense in defence or midfield - force the game; clear fast and long. United now had a mountain to climb, but were unable to engineer a clear sight of goal.

On 53 minutes another Macmillan (Kettings?) free-kick, 24 metres out to the left of the Carloway box, hit the wall and from the resulting corner, another attempt was blocked on the edge of the box, before being cleared long. On

the hour, Macaulay manhandled his way down the left, then, 6 metres from the line, his cross went through the crowded 6-metre box to Fraser Macleod at the far post, but Maclennan somehow managed to block his shot for a corner to his left. The corner came high and deep to Crossley 16 metres out from the far post, but his neat turn and volley just cleared the left-hand side of Maclennan's bar.

Two minutes later and the young keeper surely won the award for the **Most Amazing Save of the Season**. Another corner from his left was met by Moody 12 metres out by the left, and his reverse cross broke to Mackay at the other post, but Mackay's blast from 8 metres out was miraculously blocked by the keeper and spun away for another corner. Even Gordon Banks might not have got that one!

As the clock ran down, Carloway sank back, in job-done mode, letting the Stornoway boys come at them, then breaking fast whenever possible. After 69 minutes Macaulay came charging through the centre into the box, but his square pass left to Fraser Macleod ended with a right-foot stab clear of the far side of bar and post by a foot. On 74 minutes Macaulay again broke, this time through the centre into the United half, then slipped the forward left to "Pongo" drifting off the end of the line, 20 metres from goal, but his left-foot drive was read by Maclennan to his left.

Two minutes later and Carloway extended their lead, albeit fortuitously. An Anderson free-kick midway within United's half, on their right touch-line, was curled in beautifully, à la Martin Peters. It cleared the encroaching line towards the far post, where, 6 metres out, an unfortunate defender, lunging to deny "Pongo", brushed it home (0-4).

The pace of the game now slowed to that of an Exhibition Match. On 79 minutes a "D.I." break on the right and cross was headed on by "Pongo" for Anderson to hook over from 18 metres. Then, in 84 minutes, a remarkable pinball scrum took place in the United box, ending with Maclennan once more excelling himself with a block from "Pongo", 8 metres out on the left. The game ended with two final chances for "Pongo", a strong header from 12 metres by the far post from an Anderson corner on the United left cleared the bar, then Maciver was sent clear by Mackay behind the line in the centre but his intelligent side-footer to Maclennan's left from 20 metres went a metre wide of the keeper's left-hand post.

Full-time: United 0 Carloway 4

The first half-hour recalled Shankly-Revie meetings from the 60s, when the over-riding priority was to prevent the opposing team scoring; scoring yourself was secondary: prevention rather than creation was the immediate aim. The difference was, of course, that Liverpool and Leeds United were professional outfits and could control/change tempos as required. This approach, changing gear when necessary, is more problematic for the likes of Carloway: to achieve, rather than deny, doesn't always come easy at this level.

Carlway were successful in imposing their style on this game from the beginning, but, after 30 minutes, found it immensely difficult to start pressurizing United, when they saw fit. Also, there was an unfortunate slackness in control and movement in this early period which led, in turn, to squandered opportunity and ball loss in the centre and midfield, which a more effective team would certainly exploit. Hopefully, it wasn't a subconscious arrogance. The warning signs were there. Back, Lochs, and Westside will certainly not be so forgiving.

The diehard fans will find out next Monday against Back, and certainly the following Friday at Barvas. Perhaps, it will be all over after those two games. Who knows. The postponement of last night's game at Barvas was, to say the least, unfortunate. The result might have unclouded the waters significantly. As it is, the participants in that game will now know what they have to do to win the title (if they still can), something now probably denied to Carlway in their final matches.

Someone up there is certainly not favouring the Blues, with further difficulties being Seumas Macleod playing his last game last night; "Gochan" suspended for the three games versus Westside, Harris, and Lochs; and their iconic captain off on honeymoon for a fortnight from Friday onwards. Athletic, their main rivals, may have lost Scott Maciver, but as soon as you start counting on other sides doing you a favour, your focus dissipates.

United Man of the Match: Jack MacIennan.

Carlway Man of the Match: Gus Maciver.