

Lewis and Harris League:

Carloway 3 (1) Back 0 (0)

Fraser Macleod 40

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald 52

Calum Tom Moody 73

At Cnoc a' Choilich, Carloway.

Monday, 12.8.13.

Ref.: D.J. Maclean

David Beaton

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

Kevin "Gochan" Macleod ☒ Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Billy Anderson Murdo "Sqweg"

Macleod (capt.) Dan Crossley

Scott Macaulay Fraser Macleod

Subs.: Kenny "Beag" MacIennan (Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald) 67; Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur (Scott Macaulay) 80; Kevin "Barra" Macneil (Kevin "Gochan" Macleod) 83.

Subs. not used: Colin Maclean; Ben Smith.

Yellow card: Kevin "Gochan" Macleod 41.

The roar from the Carloway Show revellers in the Doune Braes around 9 p.m. last Wednesday night was most likely heard in Fivepenny itself, if not North Rona. No, it wasn't spontaneous applause for Fergie Macdonald's virtuosity on the button accordion. It was an outpouring of shocked amazement at the news that the goddess Fortuna, with all her mythological capriciousness, had uncharacteristically favoured the Blues, by allowing Micheil Russell-Smith to score a last-minute winner for Ness in a stunning 2-1 home League victory against the Champions.

This unexpected result instantly clarified na Gormaich's immediate task; aware that their main rivals, Athletic and Westside, could now only attain a maximum of 39 points, and still had to meet at Barvas, this set the Blues' maximum requirement at 6 points, from 4 games, to win their first-ever League title.

On paper, such possibilities always appear straightforward, though certainly not as easy as some have commented: on Wednesday evening Pluto remarked that Ness's victory had, "*virtually hand(ed) Carloway the title on a silver salver.*" Kenny Flip added that the result, "*basically hand(ed) the title to Carloway.*" Hmmm

This procession to glory is being presented as an problem-free coronation, yet when a team sees opponents like Murray, Chris, and Jason Macleod; D.J.Macdonald, and "Mowgli" trotting out on to the field to face them, the realisation soon dawns that it might not be as easy as some predict. None of the Bacachs had turned up to work off excess fat: no team accepts they must fail, because Carloway are Champions-elect. More likely, the opposite. Mindful of this, na Gormaich faced this first potential banana-skin on their journey towards the record book.

Two years ago, the Bacachs turned up here themselves as Champions-elect,

knowing that Carloway must beat them to maintain their own faltering League challenge, whereas a draw would achieve their ambitions. In a tense, fluctuating thriller, the men from Coll did not weaken but secured this point in an enthralling 2-2 draw, their second that mild September evening converted by one Fraser Macleod, who, ironically, was to lead the Blues this Monday. Since then, however, Back have lost Martin Maclean, Iain "Tohan" Macleod, and Kevin "Bloxy" Murray, and Ross Hall is out for this season; but as they rebuild, Carloway appear in their prime, and in their three earlier meetings this season in May, have thrashed the Bacachs 6-0 in the ABC Cup Final; prevailed 4-0 in the Coop R.2 at Cnoc a' Choilich, then edged a dour League battle at Col Uarach, 2-1.

However, tonight, the Blues lacked Seumas Macleod (now based in Glasgow), Domhnall Mackay (on honeymoon), and Andrew "Tago" Maciver (returned to East Africa); though Kenny "Beag" MacIennan was still available and the inspirational Kevin "Gochan" Macleod could play, before his 3-game suspension.

The atmosphere this evening was slightly less charged than it had been in 2011, the attendance certainly reduced, though both sides opened as cagily. Back clearly awaited a blitzkrieg: Anthony Maciver lay deep, in the centre circle, Colin Maclean square right, with Chris and Murray Macleod practically auxiliary defenders to a four-man back-line. Carloway flooded midfield, retreating *en masse* at speed if the ball was lost, and supplying playmakers Anderson and "Sqweg" whenever the ball was loose and/or won, and they in turn would relay a long ball diagonally or high centrally to release "Gochan" right, Frazmac and "Dokus" centrally, or Crossley and Macaulay left. "Enthralling", it wasn't; competitive, yes.

After 5 minutes, Carloway's first corner came over high from James Macleod's left, reaching "Dokus" 16 metres out by the far post. He twisted left off his marker, but Macleod read his left-foot drive perfectly, despite a nasty deflection, to push it away at full stretch for a corner to his right. Immediately the Bacachs broke through the centre and a through ball found "Egg" loose between Moody and Maciver, moving into the box, but from 16 metres he somehow managed to send his low, careful strike just outside Beaton's right-hand post. A sigh as deep as the Mariana Trench went round Cnoc a' Choilich after that let-off! It was to be Back's best chance till the last kick of the game.

However, na Gormaich could not immediately capitalise in a relentless grind of a chance-light first-half. On 14 minutes Anderson freed "Gochan" breaking right, and his low cut-back from the bye-line found "Dokus" 18 metres out by the near post, but his drive was blocked by multiple bodies for yet another corner to the Back left.

Midway through the half Chris Macleod was sent right, into the Carloway half, but Maciver recovered fast to block him on the edge of the box for a corner. A minute later "Dokus" emulated him, tricking his way inwards past two defenders, but his final right-foot shot soared high and wide to Macleod's left

from 20 metres.

Force of numbers at the back was causing strikers to shoot long, from wide, or repeatedly play it back. On 28 minutes Crossley swept forward but from 24 metres his final shot went well wide of Macleod's right. On the half-hour Fraz Mac's pace carried him clear on the right and into the box, before his low drive from an acute angle, 16 metres from goal, whirred off Macleod's blocking hands, crashed off the underside of the bar, and was cleared. On 33 minutes another Crossley run down the left carried him diagonally into the box, but his parting attempt from 16 metres flew a foot over.

The Blues finally stopped sweating in the fortieth minute, and, as usual, the move began from Anderson in the centre circle after a blocking tackle sent a fast diagonal to a retreating Macaulay just inside the left of the Carloway half and his rapid reverse switch behind the advancing line allowed Fraser Macleod to move in unhindered in the centre. Macleod was out like a flash to counter his low right-foot drive from 20 metres but the pace and power of the ball carried it through his legs and into the centre of the net (**1-0**).

On half-time, just as the tuck shop queue was forming, Carloway had an 18-carat chance to guarantee relaxing half-time Bovrils all round the ground. A high clearance from the Back area was hoisted back in by "Sqweg", 25 metres out to the right. Macleod managed to claw the up-and-under out under pressure just under the right junction of bar and post, and the loose ball bounced straight to the unmarked Moody, 8 metres from goal leftish, but his coolly-taken first-time right-footer was miraculously blocked clear off the goal-line by Jason Macleod, for the galloping "Dokus" to drive the rebound wide of Macleod's right-hand post from 14 metres.

Half-time: Carloway 1 Back 0

The heaven-sent goal had clearly allowed the Blues' script to be updated: pressurise at every opportunity; shoot on sight, whenever you see James Macleod, regardless of distance. Operation Barbarossa ensued. Immediately a racing Macaulay shot low and wide to Macleod's right from 24 metres. Then "Fraz Mac" was supplied on the other wing and his electric pace carried him clear to the bye-line where he tricked inwards past Jason Macleod, then tried to loft the ball high across goal. However, Macleod stretched high to cut the cross out by the near post.

On 52 minutes, nevertheless, came the move which slowed the Blues' heart rates even further, as Crossley moved the ball forward on the left to Macaulay, fighting his way to the bye-line to cut back early to "Dokus", just inside the box. His instant right-foot whack gave Macleod no chance, chest-high, inside his left-hand post (**2-0**).

Two minutes later Back had an unexpected chance for resurrection when a needless trip gained a free-kick, 24 metres out in the centre, but the shot was sent whizzing high and wide to Beaton's left. On 58 minutes the indomitable Gus Maciver won the ball in his own half, then charged forward down the

right. His high cross from midway within the Bacach half soared to "Gochan", 10 metres out in the centre, but his delicate head-flick crept beyond the Back right-hand post.

The surge gradually abated and Carloway became increasingly careful to hold the ball and/or wait for the Bacachs to come forward, win the ball as they could, then pass it around neatly - and invitingly - in the back/midfield, then crack a sudden breaker forward for the pace men to register. On 65 minutes "Fraz Mac" was sent free on the right, then cut back to "Dokus" in the centre on the edge of the box. Blocked, he back-heeled to Macaulay, but his left-foot drive off a bobbing ball cleared the bar left. Four minutes later Macaulay manhandled his way down the left to send a 24-metre drive well wide of Macleod's right-hand post.

A prevailing ambience of "*playing out time*" was increasingly evident, Back on damage-limitation duty; Carloway not taking any risks. On 71 minutes a sweeping diagonal from Anderson on the right of the centre line cleared the desperately retreating Chris Macleod for Fraser Macleod to race into the left corner of the box, but once more James Macleod read it and made himself big to block the striker's finish high to his right. The resultant Crossley corner was reverse-headed by Anderson by the far post, 12 metres from goal, but "Fraz Mac" could not quite connect as "Mowgli" shouldered off the line and past for another corner on the Back right by the right-hand post.

With 17 minutes remaining the celestial choir finally began serenading the Blues as another fast surge initiated by "Sqweg" permitted "Gochan" to escape on the right, then, 10 metres from the bye-line, loft a deep, searching cross for an unmarked Moody to materialize 12 metres out from the far post, and meet on the run to head exquisitely within the helpless Macleod's right-hand post (**3-0**).

The match more and more slowed to the pace of a bounce game now, as both sides held and held the ball, in eternal passing triangles. On 78 minutes another quick Carloway break fed Fraser Macleod in the centre circle to switch the ball fast diagonal right for "Gochan" breaking down the line like Usain Bolt, and again the early diagonal, this time low, found Kenny "Beag" breaking behind his marker, but his immediate strike from the edge of the box beat Macleod to his right but also travelled wide of the far post.

An event-free final ten minutes concluded with an astonishing save from the barely-awake David Beaton. In injury-time, Back finally forced a corner to his right and the cross headed out centrally. As the line moved out, Chris Macleod, just outside the box, sent in a low, sharp right-footer wide to the keeper's right. Amazingly, the cold, unsighted keeper got down late to stretch fully and flick it away for another corner to his right. Even Dino Zoff would have been proud of that one!

Full-time: Carloway 3 Back 0

What a difference two years make: tonight Carloway were much improved on

that night in September; Back a shadow of their Championship-winning side. Murray, Jason, and Chris Macleod, were still there, as decisive as ever; D.J. Macdonald, and "Mowgli"; Chris Adams making a welcome return for the last half-hour, but clearly the side is a work in progress. Maybe in another two years, the wheel will turn full circle again. Life - and sport - is never static.

Like the United game on Monday the 5th, the initial aim seemed to be Brian Clough's Birmingham tactic: run with/at the opposition for the first 30 minutes; contain/test them; at all costs, do not lose the early goal; then once you believe you've set the pace/the rhythm/got them playing as you want, open up. As with United, it made for a grinding opening to watch, but once the Blues started to play, expectations soared, and when the opener was secured, an inevitability crept into the contest; perhaps a dangerous assumption to make, with Colin Maclean and Anthony "Egg" Maciver hovering around. However, any team must build on its strengths; there is little point in moaning about what you haven't got, in the short term anyway.

Tonight, it was apparent once more that Carloway's main building blocks for success this season have rested on a resilient rock-hard defence: a goalkeeper as sound as the Liberty Bell itself in David Beaton; a covering centre-back/sweeper as immovable as Rockall in Gus Maciver, and two ultra-dependable flanking lieutenants in Calum Tom Moody and "D.I." MacIennan, with Seumas Macleod, "Gochan", and Dan Crossley retreating back as cover, right and left, as required. Security at the back allows playmakers like Anderson, "Sqweg", and Crossley to thrive; "Gochan", Macaulay, and "Dokus" to challenge. Having a goal machine up front helps a bit too. How the Blues will cope in their last four games without "Gochan" and Domhnall Mackay, versus Westside, Harris, and Lochs; and without Seumas Macleod at all, will be a real test of character.

Carloway Man of the Match: Calum Tom Moody.
Back Man of the Match: Jason Macleod.

Team	Play ed	Won	Dra wn	Lost	For	Agai nst	+/-	Points
CARLOWAY	13	12	1	0	48	9	39	37
Stornoway Athletic	12	9	0	3	51	14	37	27
Westside	12	9	0	3	47	16	31	27
Lochs	12	8	0	4	45	31	13	24

CARLOWAY: (a) Westside; (h) Lochs; (h) Point.

WESTSIDE: (h) Carloway; (a) Ness; (a) Lochs; (h) Athletic

ATHLETIC: (h) Lochs; (h) Point; (a) Back; (a) Westside.