

Lewis and Harris League:

Carloway 6 (2) Point 0 (0)

Kevin "Gochan" Macleod 13
Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald 20
Billy Anderson 60
Calum Tom Moody 66
Murdo "Sqwegg" Macleod 71
Fraser Macleod 82

At Cnoc a' Choilich.
Wednesday, 4.9.13
Ref.: Calum "Chancey" Macleod.
Standside line judge: Neil Macritchie.
Farside line judge: Paul Forster.

Ross "Tiny" Maclean

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

Kevin "Gochan" Macleod Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Billy Anderson Murdo "Sqwegg"
Macleod Dan Crossley

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Fraser Macleod

Subs.: Scott Macaulay (Billy Anderson) 68; Kevin "Barra" Macneil (Kevin "Gochan" Macleod) 75; Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur (Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald) 84
Subs. not used: Colin Maclean; Craig Hacker.
Yellow cards: Donald "D.I." MacIennan 46; Kevin "Gochan" Macleod 67.

Tonight the curtain finally descended on a season that at times has seemed as long as Mao's Great Trek, with an evening that Carloway *aficionados* would be excused for thinking might never arrive. Solomon reputedly said, "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven", then went on to add, "a time to get, and a time to lose." This season Carloway may have lost the Coop and Moldova Lewis Cups but what they have got in return has more than compensated.

Despite the inclement weather, most roads in Uig Parish led to Cnoc a' Choilich, though, judging by the early attendance, some fans appear to have given the actual match a body swerve and headed straight for the best seats at the celebration party! The faithfuls' hope, first of all, was that the Blues would prevail against the Rubhachs and deliver a first-ever unbeaten League season; then to be present when their own Captain Courageous, Domhnall Mackay, raised a first-ever League trophy at the final whistle.

Ever since Peter "Dokus" Macdonald began the New Carloway experiment five years ago, a revolution in the Blues' fortunes has taken place and this moment has seemed possible, if not probable. Just as an incoming tide ebbs less than it flows, the Blues have edged closer and closer, year by year, under the tutelage of his successors, Kevin Anderson and Graeme "Windy" Miller, from village green whipping boys to genuine League contenders. Two years ago, na Gormaich appeared to have one hand on the trophy, only to stumble on the final furlong. Last year the tide went out appreciably, but this season it has come in again like a tsunami.

A rampant Carloway reached 1st June before they tasted defeat (2-3 to Avoch at Culbokie in the HAC), 8th July before they lost to an island side, 1-4 to Lochs in the EaF at Cnoc a' Choilich. Records have tumbled throughout the year: an entire season undefeated by any island side away from home; over a century of goals in a single season; a striker (Fraser Macleod) scoring more than 50 goals in a season, and also about to break Donald Macsween's 52-goal record in single seasons: '89 and '91); and so on.

So, to tonight's game; the problem was who to leave out for this evening's prospective lap of glory. David Beaton's broken fingers definitely ruled him out, so 14-year-old, Ross "Tiny" Maclean, continued behind the Great Wall of Moody-Maciver-Maclennan; Scott Macaulay's knee problems relegated him to the bullpen, beside the unlucky Kevin "Barra" Macneil, who made way for the three midfield stalwarts, Domhnall Mackay, Billy Anderson, and Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod, between irrepressible playmakers, Kevin "Gochan" Macleod and Dan Crossley, in a subtle mix of drive, creativity, and pace; Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald again partnered Blues' goal-getter, Fraser Macleod, up front.

Point had drawn the short straw, filling the unenviable role of opponents, and they had to do so, minus many regular stars, e.g. Daniel MacIennan (a candidate for best keeper on the island), Alasdair Gillies, and the unfortunate Andrew Murray, the last, out for the season; defensive "great", Iain Mackenzie, was on the bench.

Despite Willie Macaulay winning the toss and forcing Carloway to play towards Heather St. and into a gale-force west sou'westerly, the Blues set out their game-plan in unmistakable fashion: a high back-line pushed their flooded midfield, regularly augmented by a roving Moody, to operate around the centre, in turn compelling their Rubhach counterparts backwards and the Reds' defence to run the edge of their box. As a consequence, Khalil and Maclean were dragged deep to link with playmaker Macaulay and though they broke frequently, Maciver immediately led a swarm of Anderson, "Sqweg", and "D.I." to deny them room to manoeuvre, and lay off or surge.

On 8 minutes an Anderson corner on Wright's right saw "Fraz Mac" beat the keeper to the shoulder-high ball, 8 metres out by the near post, but a covering defender on the goal-line did well to block his glancing header upwards with his chest, then clear the danger as far as Borge. Five more minutes of pace and spread and the burden lightened significantly for na Gormaich: a saving Crossley tackle clawed the ball from a Point attacker on their right, outside the Carloway box. He tricked his way past two opponents down the left bye-line, turning inwards off the latter on the centre-line, then, from 40 metres, he out-de Boered with an exquisitely-angled right-foot golden diagonal that even Billy Anderson couldn't have outdone, to the feet of "Gochan", 10 metres into the right of the Rubhach half. He did a Dugarry trap and move, racing to the right corner of the box, checked inwards past one marker, then a second, then drove a fiery right-footer to the right of the helpless Wright from 16 metres (1-0). What was better, the pass or the finish? One for the scrapbook.

As Point struggled to get a shape, Carloway's star rose. "Sqweg" was freed on the right and his high deep cross flew square to the far side of the box, where it was gathered by Anderson, but his early cut-back to Mackay on the edge of the box was fired a metre over the bar. Then Crossley, bursting onto the centre-line, once more released "Gochan" on a perfect right diagonal. Again he made the right of the box and his early square inwards found "Fraz Mac" clear but Wright was out like a flash to read his right-foot sweep to his right and his brilliant block shot off for a corner.

Pace, spread, and the early ball paid off again in 20 minutes. "D.I." broke out of defence on the right touch-line and played directly forward to Macleod. He in turn switched it on rapidly to "Gochan" who squared 10 metres from the bye-line for the approaching "Dokus" to side-foot past the helpless keeper directly in front of goal (2-0).

The Blues' dominant episode ended in 25 minutes when "Fraz Mac" won the ball on the left centre-line, then raced forward to the Point box, checked, then sent a long diagonal into "Gochan" running leftwards off his marker towards the 6-metre box; he slipped the ball neatly to Wright's left, but just outside the post. The game tempo now appreciably slowed, as na Gormaich moved from the Eredivision to La Liga, and their endless passing movements in the centre gradually drew the Rubhachs forward.

The contest evened, though Point still found it difficult to threaten. On 28 minutes a Macaulay free-kick from 30 metres utilized the wind but went straight to Maclean. Generally, main thrusts involved the speculative splitter for Khalil, but he was isolated and outnumbered; a Maciver bone-cruncher on 35 minutes hardly helped him, either. On the half-hour a saving tackle by Mackay on Maciver on the edge of the box denied Point their first real chance, before "Dokus" was freed on the left, cut in and shot low from 16 metres; Wright blocked to his right, the ball spun out to the arriving Mackay on 16 metres, but he in turn was blocked leftwards for a corner.

In 40 minutes another electric run by Crossley, in trademark style, winning the ball outside his own area with a sliding tackle, then charging forward though the centre like Usain Bolt, carried him past midfielder and defender, but his strike from 16 metres was expertly handled by Wright to his right.

Half-Time: Carloway 2 Point 0

Over the half-time oranges the Blues must have been reasonably satisfied with a competent first-half performance. A killer third goal did elude them, but their opponents had rarely threatened, having been denied opportunities to impose a shape/a tempo to their approach, and as a result had been kept far from the untried "Tiny" for most of the half. Granted, the La Liga pattern to Carloway tactics in the last quarter-hour had aroused some groans from a crowd that had swelled considerably as the weather improved, but, understandably, rapid pace and spread cannot be maintained constantly by any amateur outfit; batteries have to be re-charged.

The "look" of the game continued unaltered. In 50 minutes "Gochan" just failed to connect, 10 metres out, with a deep "Dokus" cross from Wright's right, 20 metres from the goal-line; Macleod did gather on Carloway's right and his swift return saw Anderson fire over from 16 metres. Two minutes later and an apprehensive shudder went through those present, as a disputed free-kick on the right edge of the Blues' box led to Macaulay striking the wall. This caused a sudden urgency to return to na Gormaich's play: perhaps, a realization that this game wasn't over yet! A quick goal for the Rubhachs, and who knows what might happen next!

In 54 minutes "Fraz Mac" broke at speed down the left and his high deep cross picked out "Gochan" perfectly, coming into the box on the right, but his drive was blocked and "Sqweg", steaming in from midfield, hit Skylab with a rocket straight up from 20 metres.

On the hour, however, the canaries finally started singing for na Gormaich and an enormous weight fell from the shoulders of all in Uig Parish. "Gochan" was sent though on the right, and his chip from the edge of the box, saw Anderson come in, 14 metres from the far post, to out-jump his marker and send the ball across Wright and inside the far post (**3-0**).

At this, a shadow seemed to fall across the Reds also, and they gradually faded from the game, certainly from the opposition half. In 66 minutes a searching Macleod cross, from the left touch-line, 8 metres from the bye-line, found Moody racing in unmarked by the far post to head strongly past the helpless keeper (**4-0**).

Though the Rubhachs still sought to hold the line and competed hard in midfield, they were now dangerously losing shape and focus. In 71 minutes "Sqweg" was freed on the left touch-line, midway within the Point half, and his high swirling cross was caught nastily by the wind to deceive Wright and lift high away from him and into the net by the far post (**5-0**).

Two minutes later Dan Crossley attempted to outdo his stunner at Ness by setting off on another mesmerizing run on the left, unexpectedly checking inwards from the touch-line 30 metres from goal, and whipping round in the centre to crack a right-foot whiplash thundering upwards off the top of the bar.

In 82 minutes the entertainment effectively concluded when "Sqweg" found Crossley on the left touch-line, 24 metres from the bye-line. Crossley glanced up, then delivered an immediate pin-point cross into the box for "Fraz Mac" to run in leftwards off his marker, and establish a new goal-scoring record with a crashing header to Wright's right from 12 metres (**6-0**).

Full-Time: Carloway 6 Point 0

So Carloway finally closed their account, ultimately in fitting style, with several of their most dependable performers registering on the score-sheet. Appropriately, it was goal-hero Fraser Macleod, whose scoring prowess has transformed the Blues in the last third of the park, who registered the final

goal of the 2013 season; livewire "Gochan" who supplied the coolest finish of the evening, to do justice to the pass of the night - if not the season - from Dan Crossley; insightful *animateur* Billy Anderson; 19-goal hero "Dokus"; one-man team, Calum Tom Moody, who rivals Angie Campbell and Andy Murray of Lochs as the most elegant island footballer; and the often underrated "Sgweg".

Early breakthroughs rendered defeat unlikely; the third on the hour confirmed victory. **Totalvoetbal** passing and movement denied Point chances to impose themselves in any concentrated, prolonged fashion, and a self-imposed defensive formation, either through circumstance or pressure, rendered the early initiative to Carloway, which they drove harder and harder as the game unfolded, neutralizing the dangerous Mo Affah. Willie Macaulay's troops turned up, but despite the best efforts of Jason Guilmartin, Sean "Bayble", Duncan Hunter, *et al*, they were unable to build, so were never going to deliver their second bloody nose of the season to the Blues.

An even harder task awaits the Blues now, something they have never faced before, defending what they have won in 2013, as it is clearly a healthy Championship, with four different clubs victorious in the last four seasons. Westside may have faded from the race late, as Carloway did themselves in 2012, but Athletic and Lochs came through strongly towards the end and not a glimmer of light might separate the sides in 2014. Indeed, if Athletic had not had that evening's aberration at Fivepenny on August 7th, tonight might have been an immeasurably more fraught occasion than it turned out to be. The position of the Bacachs this season, fourth from bottom, just two years after their glittering triumph, poses a warning to na Gormaich, and all other aspirants to glory.

First of all, any challenger has to keep a squad as intact as possible from one season to the next, something difficult to do due to the exigencies of island life. Freedom from serious and/or long-term injury/suspension is desired, especially for key players (losing Scott Macaulay and Dan Crossley with leg problems seriously diminished the side, as did the loss of Ross Hall and Martin Maclean to Back and Scott Maciver at Athletic).

Another problem can be too many aging players retiring at roughly the same time; and a lack of young players coming through the ranks, being blooded appropriately, to fill the gaps seamlessly, though na Gormaich clearly have a bright future with the emergence of Kevin "Barra" Macneil, Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur, Ben Smith, Eachainn Miller, Ross "Tiny" Maclean and Jack Buchanan.

Nevertheless, no League can be won without a Dutch-dyke defence, and this, for once, Carloway undoubtedly had, with towering performances all season from David Beaton, "D.I." Maclennan, the Yangtse Dam-figure of Gus Maciver co-ordinating, and the Makélelé-like Domhnall Mackay just in front of them.

Carloway Man of the Match: Dan Crossley.

Point Man of the Match: Alex Wright.