

Lewis and Harris League:

Carloway 7 (4) Harris 0 (0)

Fraser Macleod 21, 33, 66, 67, 80

Dan Crossley 30

Archie Macdonald 36

Ref.: Stuart Macleod.

At Cnoc a' Choilich.

Friday, 18.4.14.

David Beaton

Domhnall Mackay (capt) Gus Maciver Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur

Leigh Johnson Billy Anderson Dan Crossley Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod Archie Macdonald

Fraser Macleod Jack Buchanan

Subs.: Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald (Archie Macdonald) 45; Kevin "Barra" Macneil (Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod) 45; Josh Harris (Leigh Johnson) 45; Gordon Craigie (David Beaton) 71; Christy Smith (Domhnall Mackay) 71.

An entire League table divided these two sides in September 2013, after they had experienced diametrically opposite fortunes in the season just completed. Carloway had not lost a League game for the first time in living memory; Harris had failed to win one, and only managed to register the same number of goals that a Gus Maciver-inspired Blues' defence had conceded.

The Eilean an Fhraoich Cup aside, the Hearachs had only managed to put the ball past David Beaton (a former Harris player himself) once in five meetings, losing 0-4 and 0-3, home and away in the League, the latter forfeited because of an inability to raise a team; 1-7 in the Jock Stein; 0-10 in the HAC; and 0-5 in the Moldova Lewis. So, without a win in any competition since 2011, Gordon Greenhowe already deserved a medal for accepting the unenviable task of building a side to compete on equal terms with the other eight local sides.

A whole raft of new faces has been drafted in and this meant that when Harris ran out on to Cnoc a' Choilich (in a truly ghastly orange number), they were totally unrecognizable to the local fans. Ex-Blue, Benn Esslemont, is now off-island, Andy "Gress" Macleod retired, but where were Zander Young, John Sutton, "Fuggie", etc.? No such problems afflicted na Gormaich. Growing success clearly delivers clear advantages: for instance, the quality to attract new recruits to the cause, and an eagerness, sometimes over-eagerness, to make the starting line-up. Jack Buchanan had recovered from his nasty knee injury from Monday night, but Donald "D.I." MacIennan, now free of suspension, was still unfit and could not feature. Happily, this meant the management team were not faced with any tricky selection dilemma, regarding who could be left out, after Monday's creditable display at Creagan Dubh, especially from a defence who had performed so well, especially in the

second half. Therefore the exact same sixteen entered the fray, in the same line-up as at Leurbost.

A beautiful clear evening with the late Spring sun descending over Borghastan was marred by a strong nor-westerly, as Stuart Macleod unleashed the dogs of war on George Spy's perfectly prepared pitch. The wind, combined with a lack of tactical nous, penned Harris back deep within their own half. Carloway, in turn, had the perennial Niseach/Garrabost problem: how do you harness a gale-force wind to your advantage within the space of 45 minutes, before the turn-round and your opponents have the same "advantage"?

Over-hitting became a problem, as the ball raced away even from speed-merchants like Jack Buchanan, Leigh Johnson, and Fraser Macleod. On 10 minutes a flurry in the Harris area led to Buchanan catching the ball on the right goal-line, but his overhead centre was nodded wide of the far post by Crossley. A minute later a Johnson corner on the right reached Macdonald, 12 metres out by the far post, but his header cleared the bar by a metre. Anderson, "Sqweg", and Mackay had now gauged the pace of the wind and the searching balls from midfield over the top or wide inside began to tell. On 13 minutes a Charlie Gallagher from Anderson on the centre line sent birthday-boy, "FrazMac", free on the right but McCannon was out like lightning to beat his attempt away to his right.

After 17 minutes, a sudden Harris break on the right led to a searching free-kick creating confusion in the Blues' defence, the ball breaking out centrally, and from 20 metres a thunderous Hearach drive raged past Beaton's left-hand post at Mach 10. A minute later an Anderson free-kick just inside the Harris half on the left broke back out to Buchanan on the edge of the box. The youngster beat two men moving rightwards, but his snap turn and shot was read by the keeper and knocked away for a corner.

Almost at once the breakthrough arrived: Macdonald was fouled on the halfway line, but he jumped up and his instant pass straight forward found "FrazMac" moving into the left of the box and his immediate low shot surprised McCannon low to his right, just inside the post **(1-0)**.

A feeling of "*Here we go*" seemed to suffuse the players of both sides, and as Harris sagged, Carloway started to try from all angles. Two minutes later a high Anderson ball from the right bye-line, midway within the Hearach half, had to be tipped away for a corner. A Buchanan slip to Crossley on his right outside the box led to the latter's crack at goal whizzing a metre over, and then a rush of goals arrived.

On the half-hour a "Sqweg" free-kick midway within the Harris half, on the right touch-line, reached Crossley 14 metres out in front of goal, and he hardly had to jump to nod wide of the keeper's right and into the far corner **(2-0)**.

A minute later Mackay won a high ball forward, on the halfway line, to nod

forward for Macleod, who raced free on the left. He checked at the corner of the box, then turned inwards, but his right-foot drive only succeeded in producing a superlative flick over the bar by McCannon. On 33 minutes an Anderson corner led to a pinball contest in the Harris box, before being played back out to Anderson, and this time the champion place-kicker of Lewis sent an exquisite cross plumb on to the head of an unmarked Macleod, and he nodded this gift wide of a helpless McCannon and into the same spot as Crossley's earlier goal **(3-0)**.

Three minutes later it was four: Leigh Johnson, midway within the Harris half on the right, sent a glorious searching diagonal high to Macdonald, accelerating towards the far post, and from 14 metres, he powered a header wide to the left of an unguarded keeper **(4-0)**.

The half finished with "Sgweg", 10 metres inside his own half, delivering a de Boer special to "FrazMac", breaking left to carry to the bye-line, then send in a vicious low cross back to the arriving "Sqweg". However his careful low curler went round the defensive wall but just outside the Harris left-hand post.

Half-time: Carloway 4 Harris 0

Graeme "Windy" Miller and Domhnall Mackay had clearly decided the result was in no doubt so gave a run to 301st appearance man, Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald, Kevin "Barra" Macneil, and ex-Niseach, Josh Harris, in the second half. Harris's options were more difficult to determine: should they try to contain an enterprising, pacy Carloway, attempt to harness the wind to claw something back, or simply work on developing a tactical cohesion, especially in defence?

Immediately, however, they were under pressure from a Crossley short corner on the right to "Dokus", who sent the ball to the far post where Anderson, facing outwards, performed the neatest Dugarry downward control, then turned to thwack the ball against the rushing McCannon, before spinning away for a corner. Nevertheless, the Hearachs at last began to feature as an attacking force, as the triple substitutions seemed to lead to an initially disjointed approach from the Blues. On 52 minutes a speculative free-kick from 24 metres whipped straight through low to Beaton. Then three minutes later a second free-kick, midway within the Blues' half near the left touch-line, raced invitingly across the box, 10 metres out, but there were no takers.

Eventually, na Giormaich's formation started to gel and on 65 minutes a melée within the Harris box saw the ball break out to "Dokus" on the edge of the box, but the goalie reacted instinctively to block superbly to his left. However, a minute later, Crossley ran free on the right and his cross found an unmarked "Frazmac" by the far post to knock home without hesitation **(5-0)**.

Immediately it was six, as a Buchanan through ball from just inside the Harris half, in the centre, was controlled by "Frazmac", who then stormed into the box to fire past a helpless keeper from 16 metres **(6-0)**.

A "Dokus" run from the halfway line to the edge of the box followed, where he checked rightwards, before lifting a carefully-placed shot just over the bar. On 75 minutes Harris finally came close when a dangerous free-kick on the right, 25 metres from goal, had to be punched away, under pressure, by Craigie. Two minutes later, Buchanan headed on a Mackay forward pass for Macleod to carry into the box, but his sharp clip from 16 metres was blocked by McCannon to his left, and cleared after a hectic scramble.

Next, on 80 minutes, Crossley broke through the middle, made space for himself moving right, and 10 metres from the bye-line, curled in a low cross across the Harris box which escaped everyone till it found "Frazmac" by the far post, to smack home without hesitation **(7-0)**.

As the clock ran down play became increasingly ragged. On 85 minutes a trademark Crossley run from the left centre line left a trail of bamboozled defenders in his wake, but as he neared goal, the goalkeeper read his flick from 12 metres expertly with his feet, low to his left. A minute later Harris almost recorded a consolation goal when Lewis Don broke deep on the right into the Carloway half, but his low fireball from 25 metres was saved at full stretch to his left by Craigie for a corner.

Full-time: Carloway 7 Harris 0

As on Monday night at Leurbost, every Blue performed creditably, as they gained a further grip of the new shape, with new personnel. No team loses Seumas Macleod, Calum Tom Moody, Kevin "Gochan", and Scott Macaulay without suffering, although the new boys - Macdonald, Johnston, "Tiger", and Buchanan - are more than adequate replacements. Also, losing the pace and ingenuity of Crossley on the left requires massive adjustment but has been more than compensated for by his level of dominance in the centre beside Carloway's best reader of the game in Billy Anderson.

A certain solidity may have been lost by the departures, initially anyway, but extra spread and pace up front has arrived. If Maciver, Mackay, and "Sqweg" continue to win more than 50% in the tackle (in Gus's case, 90%!), and Anderson and Crossley continue to deliver the killer balls forward, Jack Buchanan and the feet of "Frazmac", the deadliest striker Lewis has ever seen, should deliver the rest. It did tonight, and would have been much more, but for some excellent goalkeeping. Andy "Gress" was not missed but a weakness in central defence did make it easier for the Carloway front men, who were frustrated more by an unpredictable wind than by the opposition. No team drafts in an entire squad - even an entire team of megastars - and hits it off immediately. There is no room for sentiment in football, but the hope must be that Harris eventually "get it together" - but only when they're playing other teams!

Carloway Man of the Match: Dan Crossley.
Harris Man of the Match: Richard McCannon.