

Lewis and Harris League:

Point 1 (0) Carloway 2 (0)

Ally 'Wally' Maciver 84 Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod 69

Billy Anderson 90+1

Ref.: David "Spider" Macleod.

At Garrabost.

Monday, 21.4.14.

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 (Jack Buchanan) 45; Josh Harris (Leigh Johnson) 78;

Subs. Not used: Gordon Craigie, Christy Smith, Donald "D.I." MacLennan.

The circumstances surrounding tonight's meeting could not have been more different from those of the two sides' last encounter, in the final League game of the 2013 season. Then, the Rubhachs had been the unfortunate visitors to Cnoc a' Choilich on the night of the Champion-Elects' champagne party. The Reds then had to undergo an adrenalin-driven 6-0 mauling as each Blue on the field tried to demonstrate to a huge local crowd how much he, personally, had contributed to a first-ever Carloway championship.

Astonishingly, the two sides only met twice in 2013 - in the League, of course - and the earlier contest in late June, the only League away game that Carloway did not win, had been significantly less happy for na Gormaich. An increasingly bad-tempered game had seen Point lead 3-1 at half-time, thanks to Stuart Flower and two strikes from Mo Affah, only for Seumas Macleod to claw one goal back in the 85th minute and defensive confusion to allow Domhnall Mackay to head home the equalizer in the **97th** minute!

Thankfully for the Blues, however, there was no Mo Affah tonight - or Daniel McLennan or Scott Munro, for that matter - but there was still enough on show to occupy the Blues' back-line, with the pacy ex-Niseach, Sam Mcsween, leading the line, and the elusive Ally "Wally" Maciver on his left. For the third game in a row, Carloway were delighted to choose the same starting eleven, though the newly-fit Donald "D.I." MacLennan was now able to join the bench, alongside Gordon Craigie, Christy Smith, Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald, and Josh Harris.

A beautiful clear evening saw Point choose to play into the setting sun, with the reasonably-strong east-sou'-easterly behind them. Whether or not the wind proved to be an advantage was debatable, though Carloway did have to endure a torrid opening half-hour, as they were constantly pressed and pressured by fast-reacting, first-to-the-ball opponents; to add to their difficulties, an uneven pitch negated their usual, patient passing build-ups out

of defence and searching diagonals from midfield. Pace up front, from Macsween through the middle and Maciver on the left, were initial problems for the Blues but the soundness of the defensive shield of Mackay, Maciver, and Macarthur repeatedly drove the Rubhachs wide where they tended to overhit and/or over-run the ball.

Two early opportunities for the Rubhachs led to overhit crosses, before a lost ball after 7 minutes in midfield led to a wicked rebound behind Maciver, midway within his own half. Macsween was on to it in a flash and carried it well into the box before Maciver somehow managed to get a sliding right foot in to boot it away for a corner on the the Carloway left. A moment later and a strong run on the right by Kettings (?) saw his drive soar over Beaton's right-hand bar.

Gradually the Blues' midfield gained equilibrium, with "Sqweg" and Anderson gaining a form of control and Crossley increasingly surging, allowing wing runs from Johnson and Macdonald. However, on 27 minutes, a needless foul directly in front of the Blues' goal, 24 metres out (a sure sign of uncertainty in the Carloway ranks), saw "Wally" Maciver make Beaton's right-hand crossbar twang like a bowstring, before whizzing off right for a corner.

Nevertheless, as the half progressed, na Gormaich finally created a few half-chances; after 32 minutes neat interplay between Maciver and Crossley on the left saw Macdonald released down the wing but as he cut in, his cross/shot from outside the left edge of the box was blocked for a corner. Five minutes later a trademark Crossley run out of his own half took him to the edge of the Point box where his shot was blocked by a mass of defenders, ricocheted to Buchanan, who turned rightwards, then whipped in a drive which was also scrambled away, this time to the right.

On 41 minutes a giant "Sweg" free-kick from midway within the Point half, out on the left touchline, created a minute-long pinball melée within the Rubhach box, before being booted as far as Chicken Head.

Two minutes later came the breakthrough - at least, so the crowd thought. An enormous throw-in from Johnson, by the Point corner flag, on their left, was nodded on by Anderson, 8 metres out at the near post, and came right through square to "Frazmac" at the other post, to nod home easily. Amazingly, Alex Wright somehow got along his line to sweep a clawing left hand over and push the ball wide of his right-hand post. Holy macaroni! A definite candidate for **Save of the Season!** Even Lev Yashin wouldn't have got that one!

Half-time: Point 0 Carloway 0

91-goal man, "Dokus", now replaced the injured Buchanan and immediately went for his 92nd. On 51 minutes neat interplay deep on the right, between Johnson and "Dokus" saw the latter check back to send a high swinging lob-shot over Wright but just past the top of the far post. Two minutes later another Crossley run from the centre line was crowded out in the box for a

corner on the right but the resultant Mackay header cleared the bar by a metre. On 57 minutes Macleod played the ball back to "Sqweg", 35 metres from goal, but his powerful low drive was read easily by the keeper.

Desperation to score led to over-commitment forward, hence opportunities for the opposition. After 61 minutes yet another Point free-kick, midway within the Carloway half, in the centre, saw the ball crashed against the wall, before another Maciver run down the left, saw him cut in, just outside the box, but his effort cleared the left-hand bar by a metre. A Crossley free-kick from 22 metres. low from the left just escaped the arriving "Frazmac"'s toe on the 6-metres line, before an almighty "Sqweg" free-kick, on the left just inside the Rubhach half had to be headed away for a corner.

And then the breakthrough really did arrive: on 69 minutes "Sqweg" on the halfway line, by the right touch-line, once more lifted the ball high into the Point box, where this time it descended by Wright's right-hand post. The ball plummeted to the base of the post and as half the players on the park crushed towards it, Wright was unable to prevent the ball crossing the line slowly **(0-1)**.

Carloway visibly relaxed (job done?) and Point's forward movement became frenetic. The 72nd minute led into a minor siege of Beaton's goal: a "Wally" corner led to a scramble in the Blues' box and a boot clear for a throw-in, which led to a flighted ball in, a second melée in the Carloway box; another corner and clearance, this time to the edge of the box, from where the ball was crashed low and a metre past Beaton' left-hand post.

However, just as everyone was starting to check their watches, Point's most dangerous attacker finally equalized in the 84th minute. An untidy defensive mix-up outside the Carloway box on their right saw Maciver jet on to the breaking ball, and into the box. Beaton raced out to block the shot well, but was unlucky to lose the ball as it squirmed under him and to his left, where Maciver reacted instantly to stroke the ball across the retreating Gus Maciver and into the far corner **(1-1)**.

No doubt a groan went round Garrabost at the thought of another half-hour of this! Then suddenly in the 88th minute, yet another flighted forward ball, this time from Sean "Bayble", led to another unholy stramash within the Blues' box. The ball eventually broke down and slightly behind Macsween, who turned well, to his left, then whipped round, 10 metres out by Beaton's left, and hit the ball solidly, but was unfortunate to drag it a couple of feet wide of the far post.

Three minutes later, and it really was all over. A Crossley free-kick, 24 metres out in the centre, was blocked, Macsween broke, was savagely crunched by Mackay(?), and the ball played forward to "Frazmac" who broke to the right bye-line, then crossed low. A couple of ricochets sent it back to him to supply Anderson at the left corner of the box. He turned and sent a high delicate lob-shot over Wright and in off the underside of the keeper's right-hand crossbar **(1-2)**.

Full-time: Point 1 Carloway 2

The stunning late strike from the most effective midfielder on the park was a hard pill for the Rubhachs to swallow. Point, no doubt, are wondering how they managed to let this one get away, considering their ball possession and territorial dominance in the opening thirty minutes. However, the result demonstrated clearly the old adage on Europe articulated by Mourinho, that all the possession and territory in a game matters little; it's taking chances that counts.

Thus, with his Inter Milan side against Bayern Munich, and Real Madrid versus Barca, he instructed his sides to lie back and allow their opponents to pass the ball around all they liked and play out their neat patterns, knowing full well, that when the opportunities arrived, Milito and Ronaldo would deliver. Not that Carloway chose to play that way. For most of the half they simply were not permitted to establish a rhythm and cohesion to carry them forward, and were pressured into error and ball-losing by eager opponents. Thankfully, for the Blues, however, hardly any clear-cut chances were created by Point; unfortunately, the same could be said for Carloway.

It was the nature of the tie, of course - most cup-ties, in fact. The first object is to deny the opposition; we'll worry about scoring ourselves later - after half an hour or so; the Birmingham City approach to all games, according to Clough. However, in the last part of the first half Crossley and Anderson began to force out a shape and forward movement, and gradually Johnson and Macdonald started to surge on the wings. Not that Point's two main threats, Macsween and Maciver, ever disappeared; indeed. Macsween almost killed the tie two minutes from the end, but after the first half-hour, the balance of play began to favour the Blues' and eventually the chances too.

Point Man of the Match: Stuart Flower.

Carloway Man of the Match: Billy Anderson.