

Lewis and Harris League:

## **Carloway 3 (1) Back 1 (1)**

*Jack Buchanan 26, 55, 90+1 Donald "D.I." MacIennan (o.g.) 34*

*Ref.: Robert Mackay.*

*At Cnoc a' Choilich.*

*Friday, 6.6.14.*

*David Beaton*

*Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Gus Maciver Donald "D.I." MacIennan*

*Kevin "Barra" Macneil Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Dan Crossley Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod Archie Macdonald  
Leigh Johnson Jack Buchanan*

*Subs.: Billy Anderson (Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod) 45; Graham Thomson ( Leigh Johnson) 77.*

*Sub. not used: Gordon Craigie; Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald; Euan Macleod.*

It's less than three years since that memorable September night in 2011 when League leaders, Back, arrived at Cnoc a' Choilich, knowing that they could afford to lose yet still become Champions, so long as they avoided defeat in their final League game, at home to United. Carloway, in turn, knew this was a must-win situation, as was their final fixture at Fivepenny, to have any hope whatever of League success. In the end, they were to draw both, and the Bacachs secured a title that the Blues, for most of 2013, had thought destined to be theirs. Surprisingly, only four squad members survived from that evening - David Beaton, Domhnall Mackay, Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod, and Kevin "Gochan" Macleod - while Back have suffered similar departures: e.g. Kevin "Bloxy" Murray, who opened the scoring; Fraser Macleod (yes, that Fraser Macleod!), who appeared to have secured victory midway through the second half after a scintillating move involving Chris Adams and Martin Maclean, both also gone; Iain "Tohan" Macleod, Ross Hall, and so on. The confrontation ended with two stunning strikes from Andrew "Tago" Maciver, the second in the 88th minute, which set up an electrifying final few minutes, but a winner proved a step too far for na Gormaich.

Tonight could hardly have been more different from that evening: the referee, Robert Mackay, might have been the same, but there was only a moderate crowd; a Back side struggling to rebuild, although they had won their last two games; and a Blues squad recovering from Monday's bruising encounter at Creagan Dubh.

The first good news was that "Windy" had rebuffed Celtic's approaches, and the Bhoys had been forced to opt for second choice, Ronny Deila. Second was the news that Leigh Johnson had returned from his Southern Isles commitments and was available, as was Archie Macdonald, who had been ruled fit to play. Others, like Dan Crossley and Jack Buchanan, first "over the top" on Monday, made the squad; Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod, also battle-weary, elected to start. Josh Harris, however, was still recovering from tissue damage, and Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald and Billy Anderson, other full-on combatants at Creagan Dubh, started on the bench. This meant that Kevin "Barra" Macneil continued at right wing/half, with Johnson returning, to partner Buchanan up front. Back survivors from the 2011 squad included Michael Maciver in goal; Jason Macleod, at centre-back, alongside former Blue, Ali "Tolsta" Maciver; Chris Macleod in central midfield; and first-class pain in the posterior, Murray Macleod, wherever you least wanted him.

There was the lightest of sou'westerlies, and the setting sun, in the Bacachs' faces as Carloway kicked off on George Spy's perfectly prepared pitch; the aesthetic high-point had to be the concentric circles emanating from the centre spot. Initially, the Blues' defence kept the line high to keep Colin Maclean/Gordon Maciver/Murray Macleod well away from Beaton, and allow "Barra"/Mackay/"Sqweg"/Crossley/Macdonald to meet a combative midfield head-on. In 5 minutes "Sqweg" won the ball in his own half, before supplying Crossley who immediately burst forward through the middle on a trademark run, to power a shot a metre over the bar from 24

metres. A minute later a Crossley free-kick, 20 metres out by the left edge of the box, cleared the bar by two metres.

Despite edging possession and territory, the Blues' midfield were struggling to coordinate concerted moves forward, frustrated by a strong-tackling Back, eager to supply a dangerous front trio. In 16 minutes, a tussle between Crossley and Colin Maclean in the centre circle led to the Bacach breaking forward at speed between Maciver and "Tiger" and into the right side of the box, but Maciver recovered admirably to mark him wide and Maclean, unfortunately, overran the ball past on the right. A minute later Gus and Gordon Maciver got into a fankle, 10 metres inside the Carloway half, which ended with the latter sprinting clear to send a screamer high over from 24 metres.

As the pace faltered and a midfield stalemate developed, the chance-lite contest was suddenly illuminated by a movement of individual brilliance. On 26 minutes Crossley and "Sqweg" combined in the centre circle to send "Barra" free behind Stuart Smith on the right. Out on the touch-line, 16 metres from the bye-line, "Barra" sent an inviting high cross into the central area, where it ricocheted once, then was headed clear by Jason Macleod. An arriving Buchanan waited for it to drop, then from 18 metres sent a crashing right-foot volley, waist-high, just inside Michael Maciver's right-hand post (1-0). A goal in a million! Where was POD when you needed him?

Naturally, this enlivened na Gormaich, and for a while the pace ratcheted up. In 28 minutes, more "Sqweg" skill in the centre circle delivered another exquisite diagonal between stopper and back to "Barra" speeding down towards the right side of the box. This time he unleashed a low cross from 20 metres behind a rapidly retreating back-line, for Buchanan to outpace Macleod and "Tolsta" by the near post, 14 metres out, but his first-time connect whizzed at Mach speed just over the bar.

In 32 minutes it was Murray Macleod's turn to deliver a perfect breaker from the left halfway line behind "Barra" and wide of "Tiger", to force a corner on the left. Macleod then sent in a perfect in-swinging corner just inside the far post, which forced "D.I." to leap high to head clear to his left off the line. Moments later another Macleod corner, this time from the right, dropped plumb in the centre of the Carloway box, 8 metres out, where a massed clump of players scrambled to connect, the ball appearing to glance off the goal-line hero of two minutes before and behind Beaton (1-1). At least, he got the blame for it!

With equality, the pace slackened again, the midfield stalemate returned, and the chances evaporated, as the game trundled uneventfully towards half-time. There was no shortage of skill on display - from Crossley, Buchanan, "Sqweg", Murray Macleod, Gordon Maciver, especially - and application from defences and Mackay, Johnson, "Barra" and Macdonald, but an overall shape was absent and play disjointed.

### **Half-time: Carloway 1 Back 1**

The problem seemed to be how to energize na Gormaich. Had Monday night been so debilitating? Were they already thinking of HAC R3? At times, the Blues had looked jaded, concealed by the fact they faced opponents who lacked concerted strike-power, despite the best efforts of Gordon Maciver and Murray Macleod. Also, the match fitness of certain participants was debatable. "Windy" bit the bullet: "Sqweg" was rested; Billy Anderson took over. Immediately, it seemed like a master stroke.

On 49 minutes a Johnson corner broke out to "D.I.", just outside the centre of the box. He drove it back in for Anderson to reflex-hook a right-footer up and over from 10 metres. Two minutes later a driving Mackay run took him from just inside the Blues' half on the right, 15 metres into

the Back half, before releasing a low cross-field diagonal to Buchanan, peeling off the left of the retreating defence, 16 metres from goal, but as he turned, the ball spun forward off his boot and Maciver was out like a flash to smother it.

However, in the 55th minute, the breakthrough arrived and, again, it featured an inspired piece of opportunism by Buchanan, made possible by insightful set-up play by Billy Anderson. A low Anderson cut-back, 8 metres from the bye-line, just outside the box, was knocked back to the striker, 10 metres out, in front of goal. It crept past his right, but he turned back, then, unexpectedly, whipped round and crashed an unstoppable right-foot shot high into the net, to Maciver's left (**2-1**).

On the hour the Bacachs had a golden opportunity to claw their way back, when a deep, high cross from Murray Macleod, midway within the Carloway half, 6 metres from the touch-line, came diagonally towards the far post. Beaton was on it but, under pressure, was unable to hold it as it passed him high, and as it broke behind him, Colin Maclean cracked it goal-wards from 12 metres. Amazingly, Macdonald managed to block it on the line with a foot, and the ball was last seen bouncing eastwards down the Pentland Road.

Six minutes later na Gormaich responded in kind, when a glorious, searching diagonal by Anderson, from within his own half, allowed "Barra" once more to beat the line on the right, but his square low cross, 12 metres from the goal-line, was read by Maciver, who pounced on it as it passed the near post.

With Gordon Maciver now lying deep, Back attacks became largely sporadic and the balance of play gradually swung the Blues' way, though the Bacachs could not be said to be under pressure. In the 73rd minute, a Crossley through ball from his own half split Macleod and "Tolsta", for "Barra" to glide into the box, but Macleod recovered magnificently, to slide the ball off his toe and wide.

Four minutes later the men from Col Uarach had their final realistic chance to rescue one point, at least. A concerted move out of the centre circle saw Maclean(?) supplied, moving towards the right of the Carloway box. 22 metres from goal, he sent a sweeping ball leftwards, for Murray Macleod to ghost on to, off the end of the defensive wall, and move in, left of goal, but as Beaton advanced, he uncharacteristically pulled his low hard left-footer a foot wide of the far post. In 85 minutes, Back's game was effectively over when a "Tolsta" free-kick from the right half-way line was nodded past Beaton's right-hand post by Jason Macleod from 16 metres.

Then, in added-on time, a final moment of individual brilliance concluded the evening. A long ball out of defence on the left was headed on by Macdonald and was just beating Jason Macleod though he got the top of his head to it but only glanced it on. As he turned, Buchanan roared in to touch it beyond him, outpaced Macleod, and as Maciver started to come out, from 30 metres, leftish, whammed a daisycutter with the outside of his right foot to curl round the keeper then turn inwards inside Maciver's left-hand post (**3-1**). An absolute peach!

### **Full-time: Carloway 3 Back 1**

Well, Carloway edged it in the end, mainly due to a markedly improved performance in the second 45 minutes, in which na Gormaich, by force of character and will, recalled dominant features of their play throughout the last 18 months: forcing midfield/wing drives from Mackay, "Barra", Johnson, and Macdonald; surging, elusive runs through the midfield from Dan Crossley; an inspired, creative contribution from Billy Anderson; and moments of outstanding control/execution by Frazmac's successor, Jack Buchanan, who, in the space of 14 games, has established himself as a priceless asset to the squad.

Once again, the most dependable part of the team - Beaton, "D.I.", Maciver, and "Tiger" - were solid as a rock and rarely troubled, but, in the first half, an out-of-sorts Blues' side struggled to overcome a Back team which was far better than most expected - except in the last quarter of the field. The threat even lessened in the second half, with Gordon Maciver withdrawing deep, and Colin Maclean and Murray Macleod closing from either flank. Not that either strategy bothered defensive colossus, Gus Maciver, nor his counterpart in midfield, the indomitable Domhnall Mackay, with Murray Macleod's talismanic ingenuity largely unsupported, though Colin Maclean ran himself ragged on the right in search of an opening, with little success.

The only concern regarding the squad, apart from persistent minor injury to key players, might be the lost hour at Creagan Dubh and a lethargic first half tonight, but aspects of the second-half performance compensated by showcasing the ultra-positive character within the side and the match-winning talent in midfield and attack.

**Carloway Man of the Match: Jack Buchanan.**

**Back Man of the Match: Murray Macleod.**