

Lewis and Harris League:

Harris 0 (0) Carloway 8 (3)

*Dan Crossley 7
Jack Buchanan 10
Archie Macdonald 19
Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald 50, 67
Gordon "Tago" Macdonald 73, 86
Josh Harris 78*

*Ref.: Kenneth Macleod.
At Rally Park, Tarbert.
Friday, 4.7.14*

*Gordon Craigie
Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Gus Maciver Donald "D.I." MacIennan
Leigh Johnson Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Dan Crossley Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod Archie Macdonald
Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Jack Buchanan*

Subs.: Billy Anderson (Murdo "Sweg" Macleod) 62; Gordon "Tago" Macdonald (Archie Macdonald) 69; Kevin "Barra" Macneil (Leigh Johnson) 69; Josh Harris (Jack Buchanan) 74; Ross "Tiny" Maclean (Gus Maciver) 82.

When Carloway last visited Tarbert, in early June 2013, it required a last-minute equalizer from Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald to spare their blushes, but, in their defence, it can be said that it was the Monday after their colossal confrontation in Round 3 of the Highland Amateur Cup with Cup-holders, Avoch, at Culbokie, and, also, that it was an Eilean an Fhraoich Cup Round 1 First Leg. Therefore, regulars like David Beaton, Gus Maciver, Calum Tom Moody, Seumas Macleod, Kevin "Gochan" Macleod, and Fraser Macleod were ineligible, and a lengthy injury list contained Donald "D.I." MacIennan, Dan Crossley, and Billy Anderson. With their regular squad, however, they had triumphed in convincing fashion at Rally Park: 4-0 in the League; 7-1 in the HAC; and 10-0 in the Jock Stein; and, in three further fixtures at Cnoc a' Choilich, they had gone on to win the Second Leg 2-1; record a 5-0 score in the Moldova Lewis; and be awarded a 3-0 victory in the return League game, when the Hearachs failed to field a team.

Tonight it was business as usual for the Blues, the only absentees being David Beaton again (continuing work commitments) and Phil Macleod (unavailable). Everyone else was anxious for a run, in light of Saturday's HAC Semi-Final versus Iochdar Saints at Goathill, and Josh Harris returned from ligament damage to join Billy Anderson, Gordon "Tago" Macdonald, Kevin "Barra" Macneill, and Ross "Tiny" Maclean on the bench. Despite continuing leg problems, Gus Maciver (knee), Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald (knee), and ex-Saint, Archie Macdonald (hamstring) were included in a starting line-up that continues to pick itself. The Harris side, however, contained many unfamiliar faces.

Despite a discretionary 15-minute delay to kick-off, the Hearachs suffered an initial blow before the ball was even kicked, by being forced to play the first twenty-odd minutes with ten men - Lionel Messi clearly couldn't make the early ferry from Uig. A pleasant, sunny evening graced proceedings before a rather disappointing crowd as the contest immediately settled into a predictable pattern. Sensing an initial advantage, the Blues pushed high, flooded midfield, and adopted a La Liga style right away. The Hearachs' marking, or lack of it, facilitated this approach. It appeared to be zonal, rather than man-based, but its lack of closeness and pressuring of the player on the ball - and off it - allowed na Gormaich to swirl around at will.

The reckoning arrived as early as the seventh minute. Leigh Johnson, rampant down the right in the early stages, forced a throw-in by the right corner flag. He then delivered one of his trademark specials square towards the 6-metre box, where Dan Crossley anticipated it first, moved rapidly towards the ball, then out-jumped the keeper and a defender to send a backward header high into the net by the near post (**0-1**).

A minute later the same player gathered the ball towards the left of the centre circle, then sped off on a mazy run past a string of Hearachs. Unfortunately, his progress was halted by an untimely trip, dangerously close to the penalty box. The free-kick was blocked.

Nevertheless, only two more minutes elapsed until Johnson, once more travelling down the right, cut the ball back to Jack Buchanan, retreating to the right corner of the box. He controlled the pass, looked up, then sent a perfect left foot drive round the keeper to his right and high into the far corner of the net. Another beauty! **(0-2)**.

In 15 minutes it was "Dokus's" turn to break on the right and his perfect head-high cross, 16 metres from the bye-line, was hit square for Buchanan to ghost off his marker, directly in front of goal, but his header was too predictable and the keeper held it comfortably.

Suddenly, a ray of sunshine arrived for Harris when a long ball forward that was just beating "D.I." was touched backwards by the top of his head behind the wrong-footed Maciver for the Hearach striker, No.15, to run unchallenged in on Craigie. He carried it forward but delayed just a fraction too long and Maciver appeared from nowhere to pull off a marvellous sliding block, 14 metres from goal. Two minutes later Harris's nightmare got even worse when Johnson once more tricked his marker on the right, then outpaced him to 16 metres from the bye-line, and sent a low, squared cross for Macdonald to meet directly in front of goal and send a right side-foot high to the helpless keeper's right **(0-3)**.

In 21 minutes a twisting Crossley run from the centre circle through the centre supplied Buchanan moving forward to his right, but his right-foot stab from 12 metres was deflected a metre wide of the left-hand post. A minute later Harris's missing man arrived, a slight re-arrangement of resources took place, and na Gormaich's relentless forward push was blunted for a while. In 27 minutes a long ball out of defence was chased by Buchanan on the right. He controlled it on the right corner of the Harris box, slipped it square immediately to "Dokus" on his right, who relayed it to Crossley, but his quick-fire shot whizzed a metre wide of the keeper's left-hand post.

On the half-hour, an attempt to reprise the first goal, saw Crossley once more meet a Johnson long throw by the near post, but this time the back-header flew across goal and beyond the far post. In 38 minutes another Crossley run from the centre saw him surge past three defenders and into the right of the Hearach box, but the keeper was out like lightning to block his drive from 16 metres brilliantly with his knees. Two minutes from the interval a Johnson corner on the left flew past everyone across goal but an unmarked Crossley by the far post, on the 6-metre line, just failed to connect with his right foot as it spun past Harris's left-hand post.

In stoppage time, a free-kick a metre outside the left of the Carloway box was flighted neatly over the wall by James No.10, but whacked against the right junction of Craigie's bar, and flew over.

Half-time: Harris 0 Carloway 3

The atmosphere within the Carloway dressing room was, no doubt, calm and satisfied. More of the same would be required. Gordon Greenhowe had an altogether more difficult task, motivating his troops into continuing to battle adversity. The commitment of the players was not in question, their keenness to participate, to fight for the ball, and move forward. The problem was the pace of attack of the enemy, the continuous pack movement and shape-shifting which defied closing down. Tight man-marking would distort the defence; with zonal, however, you never knew where Crossley or Buchanan or "Dokus", for instance, would turn up next, unmarked. It was to be a very long second half for the Hearachs.

Immediately a long Johnson throw-in by the right corner flag was met by Mackay by the near post and his header was angled outwards to "Dokus" on the line of the box. Instantly he connected with a right-foot rocket which whizzed a metre over the bar and was last seen passing the Flannan Isles. Three minutes later, however, Crossley broke from the right of the centre circle and sent a glorious sweeping diagonal leftwards between stopper and right-back for "Dokus" to move behind his marker, and as the keeper closed towards him, he managed to prod the ball past him, for it to trickle slowly into the far corner of the net **(0-4)**.

On the hour it was "Dokus's" turn to return the favour, winning the ball on the right, midway within the Harris half, then supplying Crossley on his left, moving to the edge of the box, but his

snapshot cracked against the upper half of the bar, and disappeared over. In 63 minutes yet another de Boer special from Crossley on the left centre line released Buchanan to turn in along the edge of the box, but his cracking right-footer flew a metre over the bar.

Three minutes later Craigie's crossbar once more frustrated the men of Tarbert, when a free-kick in the centre, 24 metres from goal, was thundered against it by No.6, before being booted clear into the Minch. A minute later an inch-perfect through ball from Crossley allowed Buchanan to run clear behind the line to the left edge of the box, but once more the keeper was out like a flash to block his right-foot stab, low to his left with his knees. Nevertheless a Billy Anderson special from the left centre line one minute later sent "Dokus" outside the line to the left edge of the box and as the keeper advanced, he sent a low screamer just inside the near post (0-5).

The Harris heads now visibly drooped and the tide moved inexorably one way. On 70 minutes a "Tago" corner on the right was fisted onwards by the keeper and gathered by Mackay beyond the far post. He laid the ball back low to "Dokus" just outside the box in the centre. He side-stepped a lunge neatly to his left, but his left-footer once more soared a metre over the bar.

Three minutes later "Tago's" name was added to the score-sheet when an almighty clearance by Craigie was glanced on backwards by the head of a Harris defender beyond his own defence for "Tago" to carry to the left edge of the box. As the goalkeeper raced out, "Tago" delivered a sizzling low special past his left hand and just inside the far post (0-6).

In 78 minutes the Fates were even crueller to the Hearachs: another dazzling Crossley run took him past three defenders and into the left of the Harris box. Twelve metres from the bye-line, he squared to Josh Harris on his right. The young striker hit it low, first-time, with his left foot; the keeper moved to his left to block, but it grazed a defender's heel and shot home to the keeper's right (0-7).

With five minutes left a clever "Dokus"/Crossley/Anderson move ended with Anderson seeing his shot from the centre, 16 metres from goal, blocked, then cleared. Immediately it was won in the centre by Mackay, who moved it forward to Crossley, and he, in turn, returned it into the box, where it was gathered by "Tago" left of centre, 16 metres from goal. He wall-passed it to Harris on his right, moved rapidly forward and somehow managed to screw the awkward return high to his left with his left foot wide of the keeper's left and into the far corner (0-8).

Full-time: Harris 0 Carloway 8

It's difficult to assess how valuable tonight's game was as preparation for Saturday's confrontation at Goathill with lochdar Saints. The squad definitely needed game practice but the effort expended, dominating midfield and pulling the Hearach defence back and forth, was hardly exacting. Loose marking allowed a *totalvoetbal* method to flourish, and, at times, the effect was mesmeric (part of its intention, no doubt) but it was the direct approach, from Leigh Johnson in the first half, and Dan Crossley and Billy Anderson in the second, which brought the goals. It could be argued that it was the style which brought the opportunities for the sudden, direct breaks in unpredictable areas which delivered the goals, but, of course, it is imperative not to concede possession with such a high approach, and players continually moving into other positions, etc. and more incisive opponents might have capitalized. That said, the only down side to tonight's performance was the nasty 79th minute ankle injury to our pivotal anchor man, Gus Maciver, whose participation on Saturday could be deemed essential. All fifteen other performers, apart from "Tiny", enjoyed a good outing tonight and appeared to emerge unscathed.

Harris Man of the Match: James No.10.

Carloway Man of the Match: Leigh Johnson.