

Lewis and Harris League:

Carloway 4 (2) Point 0 (0)

Jack Buchanan 7, 58

Kevin "Gogan" Macleod 27

Domhnall Mackay 63

At Cnoc a' Choilich, Carloway.

Monday, 21.7.14.

Referee: Neil Macritchie

Carloway line judges: Paul Forster (first Half); Angus "Dee" Macarthur (second half).

MANAGER: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

David Beaton

Donald "D.I." MacIennan Iain Angus "Gus" Maciver Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur

Lee Johnson Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Dan "Raymondo" Crossley Kenny "Dokus"

Macdonald Archie "Staato" MacDonald

Jack Buchanan Kevin "Gogan" Macleod

Subs.: Billy Anderson (Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald) 66; Gordon "Tago" Macdonald (Archie

MacDonald) 66; Kenny "Beag" MacIennan (Jack Buchanan) 74.

Subs. not used: Gordon Craigie; Kevin "Barra" Macneil.

As the season races on towards the tensest of periods when the League Championship and so many Cups are decided, the fixture list assumes a relentless quality. Wednesday catch-ups start to appear on every side's job list. With most of our squad's minds, no doubt, focussing on remaining unhurt and in the frame for Saturday week's spectacle at the Tulloch stadium, the last thing desired was a burgeoning domestic programme, and the chance of a season-ending injury at this stage. Yet after the weekend's strength-sapping Coop victory over Athletic, the Blues had to see off Point tonight, then Ness on Wednesday, to have any chance of keeping in touch with the League's runaway leaders, Westside, before having to face the Niseachs once more, a week tonight, to defend a 2-goal lead in an EaF SF.

Unlike F.A. Cup finalists, there would be no week-long training camp in the Tuscan hills for these intrepid finalists. The appearance of the guys in the Arsenal strips on Cnoc a' Choilich in itself did not arouse fond memories in Carloway breasts; more likely painful ones, of an Alex Macdonald free-kick crashing into the back of the net behind David Beaton in the 92nd minute, at Garrabost in May. Na Gormaich have only experienced the bitter ashes of defeat three times so far this Season, and that had been the only one in the League, but, of course, in a 9-club League, any defeat is incredibly damaging

to Championship hopes. Already, by early May, Carloway were a rung below the Siarachs on the Championship ladder. Better to remember the only other meeting this Season between the sides, a fortnight earlier at Garrabost in the ABC Round 1, when it was the Blues' turn to score an injury-time winner, courtesy of a Billy Anderson cracker.

Tonight, the line-up was similar to Saturday's, though "Windy" had indulged in a little fine-tuning. Josh Harris was still unfit, and "Squegg", injured on Saturday, was rested, and perhaps will be, right through to the HAC Cup Final, to allow his left leg to recover fully. Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald retreated to take his place in left midfield, and Kevin "Gogan" Macleod, whose quarter-hour on Saturday was the spark-plug that ignited the engine against Athletic, formed the dream-team with Jack Buchanan. Phil Macleod had returned to sea, but Billy Anderson, unavailable on Saturday, returned on the bench, beside Gordon Craigie, Kevin "Barra" Macneil; Gordon "Tago" Macdonald, and, surprisingly, Kenny "Beag" Maclellan, back on the island.

Unfortunately, facing them in the opposition goal, was another returnee for a short time, Daniel Maclellan, arguably the best goalkeeper on Lewis when he is around. Other unwelcome visitors were a Rudhach front-line of Sam Macsween on the right, Mo Affah in the centre and Ally "Wally" Maciver on his left. Stuart Flower was missing, and ex-Siarach, Donald "Spike" Smith, captained from right midfield.

The weather continued cloud-less and wind-free, and the players were once more assured of another unpleasantly hot 90 minutes. As if to reverse the late, developing trend of slow openings, Carloway stormed forward from the whistle, and the Rudhachs struggled, at first, to counter. In 5 minutes Mackay won the ball in the centre, came forward, then from midway within the opposition half released Buchanan breaking right, but the window was narrow, and 12 metres from the bye-line, well-wide of Maclellan's left-hand post, he did well to fire a metre over the bar.

A minute later and the gung-ho approach of the Blues was almost caught napping as a cleared ball found Macsween moving into their half on the right, then releasing the ball forward diagonally towards the centre, where it was flicked onwards between retreating defenders to the unmarked "Wally", on the left edge of the box. He came forward, but deliberated too long, allowing Beaton to rush out to make himself big, then block Maciver's slip low to his left.

How crucial that missed opportunity proved to be was rubbed in a minute later, when a de Boer long ball left from Crossley in the centre circle found Buchanan trapping it expertly on the left touch-line, in line with the box. He

checked square inwards, looked to continue, then whipped round unexpectedly, to slam a low daisy-cutter just inside the surprised keeper's right-hand post. What a beauty! (1-0) Hopefully, Raheem Sterling has a video of Jack's goals!

On 13 minutes a "Dokus" ball left from the centre line found Buchanan towards the left touch-line, midway within the Point half. He turned inwards again, this time running to his left towards the centre, then supplied "Gogan" square, in the centre. However, his fellow-striker could not get a clear hit on the ball, and his squeezed effort low to Maclennan's left hit the outside of the keeper's left-hand post and went wide.

Moments later, a similar ball, long out of the Rudhach central defence, found Macsween breaking into the centre into the Carloway half. He managed to outpace "Tiger" on the outside, but lost control moving into the right of the box, and a combination of "Gus" and "D.I." jointly frustrated him.

On 26 minutes the Blues confirmed their dominance when a "Tiger" tackle in central midfield, midway within his own half, allowed him to move forward to supply Johnson to the right, who then sent the golden splitter forward between the Point stoppers which exploited "Gogan's" explosive pace. He burst onwards, evading a red-card risking attempt to foul him, into the box, dummied the arriving Maclennan to his left, and stroked the ball home from 14 metres (2-0).

The show-boating began; the pace dropped, and the excitement abated. In 39 minutes a Carloway surge on the right allowed Johnson to send in a low cross, which was deflected outwards to "Gogan", 12 metres from goal. He shaped to shoot, then flicked the ball square left to Mackay by the other post but his quick-fire poke went a metre past the post.

As the half closed, Point had two reasonable chances to reduce the deficit. A breaking ball came out of defence to Affah, midway within the Blues' half, and he immediately played it on sharp diagonally left for his No.10 to break into the left of the box, but as he struggled to control the spinning ball, "D.I." and "Gus" jointly forced him wide. Moments later the same player was supplied by another through pass, 12 metres to Beaton's left, but as he deliberated, a crunching Maciver tackle whipped the ball away for a corner.

Half-time: Carloway 2 Point 0

It had been a relatively low-key affair, with Carloway only stirring periodically into coercive action, and then it had been to exploit the explosive pace of Lee Johnson and their twin strikers through intelligent dispatch from Crossley,

Mackay, etc. Point's danger squad of Macsween, Affah, and "Wally" had rarely been seen, mainly due to the occasional intense pressure on their supply routes and defence, but had shown, when permitted, they were adept at assuming dangerous positions. Using such opportunities was another question, entirely.

Immediately a "Dokus" free-kick from 22 metres, out on the right, travelled over the wall to Maclennan's right, but was easily smothered. The next attack saw Crossley send Johnson shooting down the right touch-line, and his head-high cross, 16 metres from the bye-line, was met by "Gogan" running along the line to meet it, but his head-flick went a metre wide of the far post.

However, in 52 minutes a reminder of the latent danger at the other end suddenly surfaced, when an Affah ball played in the breaking Macsween on the left, one-on-one on Beaton. The striker did not delay but Beaton reacted like quicksilver and the young ace's left-foot drive from 16 metres was blocked expertly by the rushing keeper's right foot.

Six minutes later the Rudhachs were once more left to rue a golden chance squandered. Ten metres from the right bye-line another Rory Delap special from Leigh Johnson was gathered, under pressure by the near post, by "Gogan", facing outwards. He somehow managed to turn, then squeeze the ball across goal where it evaded Mackay, broke onwards off a defender, and reached Buchanan by the far post. As Maclennan rushed across to block, the prize hit-man was his usual cool self, and placed the ball carefully to the keeper's left and inside the far post. So well-taken! **(3-0)**.

Five minutes later the contest was effectively over. Playmaker Crossley once more supplied "Dokus" to his left, and he dragged the ball slowly along the left touchline, then checked 20 metres from the bye-line. As he moved inwards, he swung a low ball diagonally inwards towards Maclennan. The keeper seemed to have it, but it squirmed out of his arms leftwards. He managed to palm it onwards past "Gogan" but only to Mackay, who calmly stroked it home from 12 metres **(4-0)**.

Na Gormaich now adopted the demeanour of "*Job done*", sinking back, allowing Point to come at them, then hitting on the break. In 68 minutes a Point free-kick, just inside the Carloway half on the right, was headed up and over by a couple of metres by Sean "Bayble". Two minutes later the Blues surged forward through the left, with Crossley and Anderson setting up "Gogan" to play the ball straight onwards to Buchanan on the left of the box. He checked right into the box, but his delightful flick with the outside of his right foot, heading over the keeper and high within the left junction of his bar and post, was read brilliantly by Maclennan and he flicked it away for a

corner.

In 76 minutes a clever inter-passing move down the right between Johnson and Kenny “Beag” ended with Johnson firing a metre past the near post from 16 metres. Two minutes later, Carloway’s final real chance saw a Johnson throw-in, 12 metres from the bye-line, again find “Gogan” square by the near post, and the striker’s turn and fierce low cross beat Kenny “Beag”, only to be met by Anderson by the far post, but his header zoomed wide of Maclennan’s right-hand post.

In 83 minutes Macsween won the ball on the left, then turned in square along the line of the box, but his low shot from 20 metres lacked power and went straight to Beaton. The final “*near thing*” of the game came when No.7 was sent clear down the touchline on the Carloway left. Twelve metres from the bye-line he suddenly sent in a screaming cross/shot, which a surprised keeper had to push over his bar.

Full-time: Carloway 4 Point 0

The Carloway approach tonight closely resembled what Jimmy Connors once said about any of his tennis matches: each was simply “*Another day at the office*”. Indeed, as the game went on, it increasingly looked like it was “*Another unwanted day at the office*” for the Carloway boys. Hot weather is not the normal comfort mode for Leòdhasaich, least of all those on a football pitch. Saturday’s Cup-tie had been draining, as every confrontation is with Athletic, and the thought of this game to play and yet another fixture this week, at Ness on Wednesday, was hardly likely to fill the squad with joy.

However, that is the nature of the game on Lewis and Harris. In any case, tonight, Carloway established a grip on this game straight from kick-off and once Jack Buchanan’s ace opener went in in 7 minutes, the final result always looked likely, despite a few hairy moments from the Point front men, that they really should have made more of. If “Wally” had hit the target with his gilt-edged opportunity, when it was still 0-0, who knows what might have happened next? It’s pointless to speculate. It soon became apparent that the Rudhach central defence, missing Stuart Flower, were susceptible to pace, which, of course, is an extremely prominent job description in the Buchanan and “Gogan” CVs. Tonight, they exploited this shared talent mercilessly throughout, and it was the resource that ultimately decided the game, that and the frequent killer balls that came from the boots of Crossley, Mackay, and Anderson.

Carloway Man of the Match: Jack Buchanan

Point Man of the Match: Donald “Spike” Smith.

