

Lewis and Harris League:

**Ness 2 (2)      Carloway 3 (2)**

*Ali Morrison 22*

*Archie "Staato" MacDonald 7*

*Andrew "Bubble" Macleod 41*

*Kevin "Gogan" Macleod 39*

*Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald 63*

*At Fivepenny, Ness*

*Wednesday, 23.7.14.*

*Referee: Calum "Chancy" Macleod.*

*Carloway line judges: Martainn Shields (first half); Jack MacIennan (second half).*

*MANAGER: Graeme "Windy" Miller.*

*In charge tonight: Kenny "Noley" MacIennan.*

*David Beaton*

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

*Leigh Johnson   Domhnall Mackay (capt.)   Dan "Raymondo" Crossley   Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald*

*Gordon "Tago" Macdonald*

*Kevin "Gogan" Macleod   Archie "Statto" MacDonald*

*Subs.: Ross Maciver (Kevin "Gogan" Macleod) 82; Kevin "Barra" Macneil (Donald "D.I." MacIennan) 89; Josh Harris (Iain Angus "Gus" Maciver) 90+2.*

*Sub. not used: Gordon Craigie.*

*Yellow cards: Dan Crossley 53; Kevin "Gogan" Macleod 64.*

Westside	11	9	2	0	50	15	35	29
Carloway	9	6	2	1	35	5	30	20
Lochs	9	6	2	1	16	8	8	20
Ness	10	6	1	3	27	14	13	19

A battle-weary Carloway squad continued their League campaign tonight, with their first trip of the Season to Fivepenny, keenly aware that, as ever, victory was essential to remain in touch with League leaders, Westside. No greater joy could be experienced by them - apart from HAC Cup victory, perhaps - than to keep their League hopes alive and go on to defeat and overtake their deadly west Lewis rivals at their re-arranged League encounter at Barvas on 20th August. This, of course, would be exactly one year and four days after victory at the same venue, 3-1, had guaranteed them their first ever League Championship.

Of course, Ness faced a similar challenge tonight. Defeat for Carloway would be a major blow to League aspirations, but not fatal; but for Ness, however, even a draw might not be enough, as they were already ten points behind the leaders, and one point behind the Blues, having played a game more. After a long period of Carloway dominance in their meetings, results lately had been mixed, especially at Fivepenny. In their last meeting here, last July in the League, the sides had traded blows in an

untidy first half, before the Blues went nap, scoring twice in the first two minutes of the second. An impressive 7-2 victory was recorded. A month earlier it had been an altogether different affair, with na Gormaich needing an 85th minute Stephen Boyd own goal to stay alive in a Jock Stein Semi-Final, before storming to extra-time success.

Almost a fortnight ago Carloway had toiled to prevail 4-2 at Cnoc a' Choilich over an Andy Murray-inspired Ness Select in an EaF SF First Leg, with the return next Monday. The Niseachs had been let down mainly that night through lack of strike-power, and, fortunately for the Blues, no imposing figure in green and black appeared to assume that role tonight. Also, Andy Murray was ineligible, but an opposing midfield containing Ali and "Titch" Morrison and Micheil Russell-Smith looked troublesome enough, especially with perennial danger, Andrew "Bubble" Macleod, lying just in front of them, with dead-ball ace, Craig Harris, to his left.

Tonight, Carloway were more concerned by their own selection problems. The manager himself was unavailable, so assistants, Domhnall Mackay and Kenny "Noley" Maclellan, had to overcome Jack Buchanan's and Billy Anderson's unavailability, the resting of Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod till August 2nd, and a lack of back-up. The solution was to move Archie "Statto" MacDonald forward from left halfback/wing to partner Kevin "Gogan" Macleod in attack, with Gordon "Tago" Macdonald adopting his role, and "Dokus" lying to his right. Also, ex-Niseach, Josh Harris, was fit, and could join Gordon Craigie, Kevin "Barra" Macneil, and Ross Maciver on the touch-line.

At first it was hard to believe that this picture-postcard setting was Fivepenny, an environment normally endured as gleefully as a stop on the Yukon trail. And how many Scottish grounds have the local councillor collecting the gate money in an empty ice cream carton? The stunning weather continued, with only the slightest of breezes, and Ness had the misfortune to lose the toss and play into the fiercest of setting suns. Not that it appeared to bother their nippy, young midfield, as the game roared into frantic life, with fast breaks at either end. Immediately, indecision over marking sent "Bubble" free down the right touch-line, but his low square cross was first-timed straight-up by Russell-Smith from 20 metres in the centre.

Carloway replied instantly with a deadly in-swinging Crossley corner from "Sweeney's" right that the keeper was forced to punch out and onwards, under his bar. The ball was returned, then booted clear downfield by Wallace, where it was gathered neatly by Russell-Smith, who turned it diagonally to his right behind "Tago" for "Cage" to come whizzing into the left of the Carloway box. However, from 12 metres he sent the ball zooming a metre over the bar.

Three minutes later the Niseachs were punished for their missed opportunity. Dogged pursuit tackling - once/twice/three times - by "Tiger" left him clear on the

right centre-line to slip the ball to “Dokus”, who wasted no time in supplying Johnson, speeding down the right. Twelve metres from the bye-line, he whacked in a low hard cross which MacDonald anticipated well, came in on the right at the near post, and drove home first-time, low to “Sweeney’s” left (**0-1**).

As Ness wobbled slightly, the Blues somehow managed to pass up a golden opportunity to cement their lead four minutes later. A “Tago” up-and-under from left midfield was brought down expertly, 20 metres out in the centre, by a running “Statto”, who raced on without pausing, leftwards to the edge of the box. Neil Morrison managed to block his effort, but the ball spun to “Dokus”, who, in turn, was blocked by Wallace. The pinball effect continued, as the ball shot leftwards, back to MacDonald, 12 metres out to “Sweeney’s” right. The keeper moved out sharpish to narrow the angle, but the Uibhisteach didn’t panic, and sent a careful right-footer low round the keeper. However, Morrison(?) had managed to get back, and booted the ball clear off the line. Phew!

There was another near thing for the Niseachs in 20 minutes when a high forward diagonal by “Gus”, midway within his own half, allowed MacDonald to ghost behind his marker on the left and run in on goal. “Sweeney” was out in a flash to the edge of his box to block his attempt from 24 metres, but the ball shot back to “Statto”, who hit it again first-time, and the keeper, still on the edge of his box, somehow managed to push this shot away to his right.

One minute later, it was the Blues’ turn to be punished for missing a golden opportunity, when a hotly-disputed free-kick on the right touch-line, just inside their half, came winging in, across that “iffy” territory between keeper and back-line. Each seemed to wait for the other, and Ali Morrison was left unhindered by the far post, to nod the ball home from 8 metres (**1-1**).

Red faces all round - then very angry faces all round over another disputed free-kick awarded just outside the centre of the Carloway box, but Harris’s attempt cleared the bar by a metre. In 31 minutes it was Ness’s turn to dispute a free-kick, awarded on their left touch-line in the corner. “Dokus” swung the ball in fiercely and MacDonald came swiftly to meet it, but his header tore a metre past the near post.

Eight minutes later, yet another of the countless free-kicks yielded more joy for the visitors. This time, dead-ball expert, “Tago”, delivered a perfect cross, from the Niseach left touch-line and 20 metres from the bye-line. Mackay, at the far post, reverse-headed the free-kick down and inwards to “Gogan”, 10 metres out to the left of goal. The unprotected “Sweeney” plunged immediately at his feet but the striker calmly stroked the ball over him and high into the net with his left-foot (**1-2**).

Na Gormaich had hardly enough time to congratulate the scorer before equality was restored, and faces were red all round again. This time Craig Harris delivered the

free-kick into the Carloway box, from 22 metres and high to the left of David Beaton. An attempted clearance header by "Gogan" (?) was miscued across the line, where it broke off "D.I." and down to "Bubble", who manufactured wriggle-space to squirm round and slam the ball toward Beaton from 12 metres. The keeper managed to get down to partially block its passage but the strength of the knock carried it beneath him and home (2-2).

### Half-time: **Ness 2 Carloway 2**

An undercurrent of tired inertia, no doubt provoked by a third 90 minute-ordeal in 6 days, combined with a festering sense of angered injustice, seemed to be creating a periodic loss of focus within the Carloway squad. Two sloppy goals - albeit well-taken by Morrison and "Bubble" - betrayed an uncharacteristic slowness in reaction from the best defence on the island. Further evidence had been the midfield tendency to fragment and drift in and out of the game, allowing the eager Morrisons, "Bubble", and Russell-Smith to frequently push forward unhindered. The pattern didn't change in the second half, although the atmosphere became steadily more febrile.

In 51 minutes a Craig Harris free-kick from 22 metres in the centre cleared the bar by 2 metres, and then two minutes later there was the first stooshie of this half over a yellow card for Crossley, after a late push on "Sweeney" as he gathered a cross. On the hour a typical run from Crossley, out of his own half and towards the right of the Niseach box, saw his parting low cross leftwards blocked back to him; he returned it and the ball somehow escaped everyone to reach Macdonald, just inside the Ness box on the left. He turned inward but as "Sweeney" came to meet him, he swept his right-footer high past the far post.

Three minutes later it was the Niseachs' turn to erupt over a free-kick award on the left edge of their box. The mood imploded further when "Dokus" stepped up and sent the most exquisite right-footer over the wall and neatly into "Sweeney's" top-left corner, leaving the keeper helpless (2-3).

Eventually, calm (if you could call it that) was restored and the game restarted but what had begun as simply another catch-up League fixture now degenerated into a football-free bun-fight. The long ball and the grinding tackle became the norm; play became broken, and chances evaporated. In 68 minutes a Wallace free-kick, 20 metres out and slightly to the right, was curled just a shade too heavily and crept past Beaton's left-hand post.

On 75 minutes Johnson supplied "Dokus", who broke right to the touch-line, but his inviting cross from midway within the Ness half, was nodded on and wide of the far post by "Gogan" on the edge of the area. A minute later, the striker almost settled the night, when a Mackay diagonal from the halfway line found him lurking on the

other side of the pitch, midway within the opposition's half. At 22 metres, he dispatched a high cross/shot which surprised the keeper, flew over him, and, for a moment, looked as if it was going to enter the far top corner of the goal, before continuing a shade outside the junction of bar and post.

However, another uproar soon made the fans forget this near thing. On 80 minutes a concerted Blues' move through the centre, involving Mackay/Johnson/"Dokus" saw the last move forward, survive a heavy tackle, then slip the ball forward to MacDonald, evading Scott Macrury, the last man, to his right to move into the box. Down he went. The whistle blew. Was it inside or outside the box? Cue lots of pushing/shoving/shouting/pointing, then mystified fury from the Blues as they were awarded a free-kick 10-15 metres further back. Apparently, "Dokus" was adjudged to have been fouled, but the advantage played; therefore, when MacDonald was fouled, no advantage had been gained, so we reverted to the first foul. Technically correct, but try explaining that to a bunch of very tired, unhappy young men in blue. Ouch!

Form and shape now completely disappeared from the game, and the game concluded with a final incredible series of events in the Carloway box. In 88 minutes a Ness break down the right touch-line was whipped in square and low, 16 metres from the bye-line. "Bubble" connected with it by the near post, but within a crowded box the ball ricocheted off Beaton left, was hit in again, then rebounded to Ali Morrison, who fired it in but "Tiger" blocked it this time on the line. It came out again and again "Bubble"(?) got on it but not cleanly and Beaton managed to scramble to his right and gather it. Amazing. Someone up there must love the Blues!

**Full-time: Ness 2 Carloway 3**

An eminently forgettable evening was crowned dramatically in the last seconds, by what appeared at the time to be a career-threatening injury, even worse, to Carloway's own personal Hoover Dam, "Gus", who spent 48 minutes flat-out on the Fivepenny pitch being treated, before being ferried off by ambulance. The game was then resumed to play the final 23 seconds! Amazingly, "Gus" was not kept in overnight in Ospadal nan Eilean. One hour and 37 minutes the second-half had lasted. It had felt like it.

Overall, what had seemed at first to be a fascinating confrontation between two sides with title aspirations had become a tense slugging match, suffocated by a poisonous atmosphere which was fuelled by both sides' angry frustration over key decisions. Both Ness goals had resulted from free-kicks, hotly disputed by the Carloway players. Likewise, the Blues' winner was scored from a free-kick for a foul the Niseachs protested vehemently had never happened. Na Gormaich thought they had been denied a stonewall penalty... and on and on.

Obscured beneath all this was a tired performance from a Carloway squad who seemed reluctant at times to engage the enemy, except spasmodically. "Gogan" and MacDonald didn't gel up front, with the latter tending to drift back later in the game, leaving "Gogan" isolated. "Tago" and "Dokus" struggled to find the correct niche, and Dan Crossley was uncharacteristically subdued; but Mackay and Johnson bore the standard doggedly, with the latter rampant in the opening half-hour. No mean task considering the pace of Ali and "Titch" Morrison, the forceful inventiveness of Russell-Smith, and the unpredictable movement and creativity of "Bubble". Others may have been being careful but two slack moments in defence can't detract from continuing sustained contributions of those who live by the sword, "Gus" and his acolyte, "D.I.", for whom phrases like, "*Be careful*", "*Take it easy*", etc. have no meaning. On tonight's evidence, "Tiger" will soon make the duo a trio.

**Ness Man of the Match: Andrew "Bubble" Macleod.**

**Carloway Man of the Match: Leigh Johnson.**