

Lewis and Harris League :

Carloway 1 (1) Lochs 5 (2)

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald 3 Andy Murray 14

Donald "Lava" Macleod 27, 50

Angie Campbell 55 (pen.)

Peter Mackenzie 56

At Cnoc a' Choilich.

Wednesday, 13.8.14, 7 p.m.

Referee: D.J. Maclean (Bragar)

Stand-side Line Judge: Neil Macritchie

Far-side Line Judge: Calum Murdo Mackenzie, then Allan Iain Macleod

MANAGER: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

Gordon Craigie

Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Archie "Statto" MacDonald
Lee Johnson Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Kenny "Beag" MacIannan Murdo "Squegg" Macleod
Kevin "Barra" Macneil

John "Wee John" MacDonald Jack Buchanan

Subs.: Josh Harris (John Macdonald) 68; Mark Macleod (Murdo "Squegg" Macleod) 76.

Subs. not used: Ross "Tiny" Maclean; Euan "a'Ghuilc" Macleod.

Yellow card: Kevin "Barra" Macneil 46

MANAGER: David Macmillan

Jonathan Smith Don "Lava" Macleod

Peter Mackenzie Angie Campbell Andy Murray Peter "Robbie" Mackenzie

Daniel "Nipper" Mackenzie Roddy Morrison Ally Mackenzie Donald "Nomie" Macdonald

Cameron Houston

Subs.: Calum Tom Moody (Andy Murray) 74; Chris Mackay (Jonathan Smith) 74; Alan Farrell (Donald "Nomie" Macdonald) 78

Sub. not used: Gordon "Gordy" Mackenzie.

Yellow card: Angie Campbell 90+1

Long-time Blues' fan, Will Shakespeare, clearly understood the misery associated with following a village football team, when he complained, "*When sorrows come they come not in single spies but in battalions*". The relentless intensity of football seasons on the islands pressurizes clubs remorselessly, resulting in decimated squads, and forcing those with minor injuries to continue to play through them and, of course, exacerbate them.

Carloway, already three key players down for the season - David Beaton, Iain Angus "Gus" Maciver, and Dan Crossley - now had to add playmaker, Billy Anderson, and the recently-returned Gordon "Tago" Macdonald to that list, though influential midfield duo, Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald and Murdo "Squegg" Macleod, continued to

battle through persistent niggling injury and turned out regardless. As if manager, Graeme “Windy” Miller hadn’t enough to worry about, defensive rock, Donald “D.I.” MacIennan, opted for a fortnight’s “*relaxation*” in Salou just as two crucial meetings each with main rivals, Lochs and Westside, appeared on the horizon. Kevin “Gochan” Macleod was also unavailable in the foreseeable future. Ouch!

How was the manager to solve the insoluble, and field a match-winning side? The answer was to switch players round, and draft in as many youth players as were available: Ross “Tiny” Maclean, Mark Macleod, and Euan “a’ Ghuilc” Macleod all joined Josh Harris on the sideline. Note to spectators: if you are male and under 40, please bring your football boots to all games in future. Your club might need **YOU!**

Archie “Statto” MacDonald stepped back from left half/wing to fill “D.I.’s” shoes, and Kevin “Barra” Macneil replaced him, while, fortunately, former stalwart, Kenny “Beag” MacIennan was home on leave from Aberdeen and appeared in central midfield. Former lochdar Saints’ star, John “Wee John” Macdonald, now based in Lewis, volunteered to help the Blues, rather than make them suffer, by partnering the too-often-unsupported Jack Buchanan up front.

In contrast, a full-strength Mackenzie United + guests faced them, fresh from their narrow escape versus the Rudhachs on Monday at Creagan Dubh. Two former Blues, Calum Tom Moody and Gordon “Gordy” Mackenzie, graced their bench.

The sides' opening League game of the season had been drawn 1-1 at Leurbost, though the Maroons had run out 3-1 victors at the same venue in the first round of the Jock Stein in June, en route to winning the Cup. Tonight was viewed as one of the key encounters of the final stages of the League. With the Siarachs six points ahead of both of these sides, having played a game more, it was essential for either side tonight to avoid defeat, considering that both had still to visit Barvas. A draw would suit Westside perfectly.

Weather conditions, though marginally less wet than earlier in the week, still resembled that expected daily at Goose Bay in Labrador. “*Inhospitable*” is too mild a description. Nevertheless, na Gormaich opened brightly, creating three clear-cut opportunities within the first ten minutes. An early through ball through the centre was chased by Buchanan and Houston encroached outside his box to knock it leftwards. Buchanan got to the ball first but, under pressure, was forced to slide it outwards to “Dokus” on the Carloway right, on the touch-line 20 metres from the bye-line. He checked back, then sent a beautiful curling lob-shot diagonally into the box. The wind caught the ball and carried it high into the far top corner of the net (**1-0**).

In 7 minutes a retreating Buchanan won the ball on the right centre-line, broke forward, then supplied Johnson, moving at pace before him. The winger made the right of the box, then, 12 metres from the line, sent a perfect squared, low cross beyond Ally Mackenzie for John Macdonald to ghost in in front of Morrison towards

the near post, but as Houston threw himself at his feet, he thrashed the ball over the bar. Two minutes later "Statto" fed "Barra" on the left, and, as Lochs retreated in numbers, he played in to Kenny "Beag" in the centre, 22 metres from goal. The playmaker turned, then threaded a perfect Jimmy MacIlroy rightwards between Mackenzie and "Nipper" for the unmarked "Dokus" to move in in the right of the box, but from 16 metres he sent his low strike wide of Houston - and a metre wide of the far post.

Missed opportunities must always be regretted, but even more so in this contest, as Carloway never really replicated them and the Lochs midfield now began to find its shape with Andy Murray and Angie Campbell orchestrating an iron grip on the game. In 10 minutes a scooped right-foot shot from Peter Mackenzie from 20 metres sailed beyond Craigie's right-hand post. Three minutes later a Peter "Robbie" strike from 20 metres was blocked high for a corner on Craigie's right. "Lava" then reverse-headed Murray's corner for Smith to head goalwards, At full stretch, Craigie managed to punch clear, only for Smith to head back. Again, the keeper punched upwards and this time Campbell headed back. Peter Mackenzie got there first, 6 metres out, but Craigie once more got a hand to it to touch his header over the bar.

A minute later, however, a beautiful sweeping move across the Lochs midfield, as it surged into the Blues' half, ended with Murray side-stepping "Tiger" to his right and crashing a superb, rising right-foot shot just inside Craigie's left-hand post from 16 metres (1-1).

Possession was rapidly moving away from na Gormaich and in 24 minutes it was "Nomie's" turn to come forward, down the right, to supply Smith breaking into the right of the Carloway box. He held off Mackay to the bye-line and whipped over a high looping cross which eluded Craigie, then defied physics by hitting the inside of the far post and somehow bouncing clear. Three minutes later the game started to move out of Carloway's control completely. Peter Mackenzie won the ball on the left, just inside his half, then found "Nipper" breaking into the Carloway half at speed, and his high diagonal cross found "Lava" moving beyond MacDonald and into the right of the Blues' box. As the ball moved beyond him, he thwacked a reverse right-foot volley from 16 metres across Craigie and high into the net (1-2).

Two minutes later Craigie once more had to look lively to punch a corner from his right clear from under his bar, then watch a returned drive from Peter Mackenzie soar over the left side of his bar. On the half-hour a "Squegg" free-kick from just inside the Lochs half forced Houston to tip over, but the main focus remained on Craigie and on 37 minutes the overworked keeper had to punch yet another corner away, this time from "Nomie" on his right.

Half-time: Carloway 1 Lochs 2

It was clear that Carloway were losing the crucial area of midfield control. Andy Murray was in classic Xavi form, abetted by a top-class Khedira in Angie Campbell,

to create Dutch-style inter-passing that the Blues were unable to contain. Persistent pressing of opponents enhanced the Maroons' effectiveness. In contrast, the Blues' midfield was loose. Kenny "Beag" was as explosive as expected: laying-off, moving-off, driving, supportive, but one man cannot be parachuted in to apply WD40 to an incohesive system. "Dokus" and "Squegg" did not look fit; the eager Johnson, Buchanan, and Macdonald were isolated, although they tried desperately to link.

Also, the perennial question of back-lines was starkly obvious: though both sides had two men up, Lochs had a Capello-back-line of four; Carloway went McClaren/Venables with three, as usual. This meant when "Nomie" and "Nipper" pressed to aid the Peters, Ally Mackenzie and Morrison could deal with Buchanan and Macdonald, but the inspirational Mackay could not move forward as usual in support of Kenny "Beag" as "Tiger" and "Statto" were fully occupied with "Lava" and Smith, leaving Murray, and Campbell free to move forward on "Tiger" and the captain. Hence Johnson and "Barra" were sucked back off the wings in support.

Such summings-up became academic in the opening ten minutes of the second half, when Carloway's chances of success disappeared as fast as snow in a heat-wave. In 50 minutes Smith persistence on the right touch-line led to a high swinging cross towards Craigie and as the goalie went to collect, "Lava" came in in front of him to thump a header home from 2 metres (1-3).

Five minutes later the Lochs support started to check the relative goal differences of their team and Westside. Peter Mackenzie was brought down heavily by "Squegg" on the left edge of the Carloway box. A free-kick was awarded; Mackenzie protested; the Lochs' fans roared; and after a consultation with the line judge, a penalty was awarded. Angie Campbell then sent the perfect penalty just inside Craigie's right-hand post (1-4).

A minute later, na Gormaich's suffering intensified as a breaking ball on the left was met by a soaring drive from Peter Mackenzie which practically burst the net to Craigie's right (1-5).

The final whistle might have sounded then, as Lochs knew they had done enough and Carloway were unable to counter the swift inter-passing movement which was to dominate the final thirty minutes. Cameron Houston might have caught the early bus home as the Blues struggled to win the ball frequently enough to construct any meaningful moves forward and Lochs reverted to the classic Ajax-style approach of the 70s-80s to retain possession throughout the centre.

Two glimmers of hope did occur briefly. In 63 minutes a "Dokus" free-kick on the right touch-line, just inside the Lochs half, was headed in rightwards by Mackay from the edge of the box, and Johnson managed to get a foot to it, but it shot harmlessly past Houston's right-hand post. In 74 minutes Kenny "Beag" drove a 20-metre daisy-cutter a metre past Lochs' right, after being supplied by Buchanan from the left.

Full-time: Carloway 1 Lochs 5

Massive challenges to squad availability and team selection eviscerated this long-awaited fixture. The Champions might be regarded as a team who, in certain respects, live by the sword, and must die by it, but a WMD dropped on Cnoc a' Choilich would hardly have reduced their numbers much more than they were tonight. Those on show performed gamely - commitment was never in question - but when confronted by a coherent, whole, tight outfit like Lochs were, the final result was inevitable.

After an enterprising opening 10 minutes, in which they might have scored three times, Carloway must have felt they had entered a protracted nightmare. For the next hour they were teased, tormented, and ultimately dissected by an slick brand of intricate *totalvoetbal*, with pace, movement, and shape-shifting teamwork, which replicated exactly that of the great Lochs sides of the 2000s. The Blues only saw the ball in the last 20 minutes because the Maroons clearly felt they had completely filleted their opponents, could hold the line securely, and save themselves for more crucial battles ahead. That na Gormaich have to face the same side again on Friday, then the Siarachs twice next week, is not exactly a comforting thought.

Carloway Man of the Match: Kenny "Beag" MacIennan

Lochs Man of the Match: Andy Murray