

Lewis and Harris League:

United 0 (0) Carloway 5 (2)

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald 13 (pen.), 51, 83

Jack Buchanan 25, 59

At Goathill Park, Stornoway.

Monday, 8.9.14.

Referee: David "Spider" Macleod.

United line judge: "Oz" Miller (first half); United official (second half)

Carloway line judge: Calum "Cobby" Macleod

MANAGER: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

Gordon Craigie

Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Phil Macleod Donald "D.I." MacIennan

Lee Johnson Kevin "Gochan" Macleod Kyle Brunton Murdo "Squegg" Macleod Josh Harris

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald (capt.) Jack Buchanan

Subs.: Domhnall Mackay (Kyle Brunton) 45; Ross "Tiny" Maclean (Gordon Craigie) 59; Mark Macleod (Josh Harris) 67; Euan "a' Ghuilc" Macleod (Phil Macleod) 76; Joe Armstrong (Lee Johnston) 76.

The final fixture in an ultimately disappointing season could probably not arrive soon enough for Carloway's disheartened, depleted squad. Lacking victory since August 4th, August into September had witnessed a winless run unequalled since pre-Peter "Dokus" days and included an unhappy fourth Cup Final defeat, this time 0-2 in the Cuach a' Choop, yet again against arch-rivals, Westside. There had been brighter moments - the fighting displays against the Siarachs in that Final and in their Moldova Lewis Round 1 game to Lochs at Creagan Dubh; the first half-hour in the League game versus Ness - but generally an air of gloom had been pervasive, as management had struggled to stretch their lack of personnel to cover multiple absences, and/or conceal any gaps with inexperienced youth.

Carloway's League position - 3rd - had been settled and, viewed on its own, was perfectly respectable, but the two League games prior to this evening had ended in a draw and defeat. So a convincing victory tonight could be seen to be essential, in order to sign off 2014 in good spirits and inspire hope that equilibrium would return to Cnoc a' Choilich from April 2015 onwards. United had their own battle to settle - with Back - for 7th in the table. So tonight's contest did have some meaning.

With the excellent Phil Macleod still available, the defence remained

unchanged, but Kevin "Barra" Macneil and John "Wee John" MacDonald were unavailable. However, though midfield colossus, Domhnall Mackay, still carried a minor ankle injury, probably unwisely, he still elected to appear on the bench, beside the young-bloods, Ross "Tiny" Maclean, Mark Macleod, Euan a' Ghuilc Macleod, and Joe Armstrong. With Archie "Statto" Macdonald sadly departed to Inverness, the promising Josh Harris filled his role on the left, while "Statto's" work replacement on the island, Kyle Brunton (ex-Korrie, Inverness), debuted in the centre, with the influential Kevin "Gochan" Macleod making a welcome appearance on his right. Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald and Jack Buchanan were given the task of finding a way past the best young goalkeeper on the island, Jack Maclennan.

The fact it was a relatively unimportant League match was reflected in the sparse crowd, despite an unusually beautiful, calm Autumn evening. Wasps won the toss, forcing the Blues to spend an uncomfortable first 45 minutes shooting into the setting sun, but they still managed to look marginally more dangerous in the opening quarter, with a few half-chances.

Immediately, a storming run by Harris down the left took him to the bye-line but his inviting cross arrived too early for the charging "Dokus" and Buchanan. On 7 minutes Mark Wright profited from a misplaced "Sguegg" pass in the centre circle to drive through the middle but as he lost control on the edge of the box, a savage "D.I." block led to the defender clearing long and high through the centre. Midway within the United half, a trademark trap and turn by Jack Flash allowed him to circle round Feeney's right, only to be invited to examine the Goathill turf closely.

Two minutes later a Johnson break on the right saw him play on straight to "Gochan", who crossed low, 10 metres from the bye-line. A United foot pushed the ball onwards beyond Buchanan, but Harris reverse-crossed low and diagonal to "Dokus", 12 metres out by the near post. His snap-shot was blocked outwards to his right, but Johnson's right-footer from the other edge of the box flashed a metre wide of Maclennan's left-hand post. A minute later the ever-elusive Buchanan was felled again coming in on the left but "Dokus's" free-kick from 20 metres rebounded back to him. He tricked his way to the line but mishit an attempted cross high and past.

However, an unexpected piece of luck delivered the opener to the Blues on 13 minutes. A trademark long throw from Johnson, 20 metres from the bye-line, was back-headed on by "Gochan" on the near edge of the box. In the resultant scramble in front of goal, two metres inside the box, the bouncing ball struck a hand or a hand struck the ball, which was then booted away. Referee Macleod pointed to the spot and "Dokus" stroked the penalty low to Maclennan's left (**0-1**).

The goal fired the engine and suddenly the Blues started to cohere, increasing the supply to the roving "Dokus" and Buchanan. United attempted to respond in kind but failed in the last third to penetrate a confident back-line, with "D.I." in the unfamiliar sweeper role, behind the markers, "Tiger" and Macleod. On 18 minutes "Dokus" and "Gochan" burst through the middle, towards the right, then released Johnson forward, behind his marker, but again his low drive from 20 metres zipped past Maclennan's right-hand post. Three minutes later "Dokus" Dugarry-ed the ball brilliantly, just inside the Wasps' half, then played the ball back to "Squegg", who delivered the perfect de Boer ball forward to Buchanan, to perform his trademark flick and turn to Feeney's right but his 20-metre drive drifted a metre wide of Maclennan's right-hand post.

Suddenly over-commitment forward gave Hamish Macdonald room on the edge of the box to lay off square right to his fellow striker, who slipped the ball back to the arriving Calum Iain Macdonald, but his first-time strike went straight up. A minute later an exquisite de Boer from Josh Harris, deep in the left-back position, cleared the opposing midfield in the centre and Jack Flash, facing his own goal, once more did the classic trap/flick rightwards/turn/race forward and from 16 metres outside-edged it from 16 metres past the rushing keeper, low to his left (0-2).

Four minutes later United almost brought their chances back to life. A United corner on Craigie's right came in low and was met at the near post by Chris Dempster (?), who flicked it on upwards but it hit the outside of the bar/post junction and went past. Immediately the Blues responded through "Squegg" bursting forward and firing the ball goal-wards from 22 metres in the centre. The block sent the rebound to Harris on his left, but Maclennan reacted brilliantly to move leftwards and knock the ball away with his body and left leg.

Carloway were now content to play the game at their pace, then burst in force whenever opportunity beckoned. Chances evaporated at either end, the last near thing coming in 36 minutes when a sweeping United move down the left ended in a dangerous head-high diagonal from 20 metres just arriving a moment too early for a United marksman coming into the right of the Carloway box.

Half-time: United 0 Carloway 2

The pattern did not immediately change on the resumption: Carloway stroking the ball around, as a team can with a 2-goal cushion, awaiting the openings that they believe must come as their adversaries over-commit in order to gain

a foothold in the game. And the goal did come in 51 minutes, with “Dokus” winning the ball 22 metres out and feeding Johnson coming in on his right. His attempt was blocked and spun out high to the left where it was headed on by Harris and “Dokus” won it again, just inside the box. He performed an amazing number of turns and double-turns within a square metre before turning right and ramming the ball home from 14 metres under Maclennan to his right (**0-3**).

In 54 minutes a snap drive from 20 minutes proved too hot for Craigie to hold to his right but he recovered to dribble the ball out and clear. However, his forward ball was low and Scott Montgomery won it in the centre and drove forward at pace, only to be stopped on the edge of the box by a crashing “D.I.” block. Three minutes later a Hunter free-kick on the left came over the line perfectly to the far post but the shot was snatched and flew two metres wide on Craigie’s right.

Another long clearance from Maclennan reached Buchanan a minute later on the line of the United box. He turned left, then double-backed to crack a low drive into the bottom right-hand corner of the Wasps’ net (**0-4**).

As increasing numbers of substitutes were given a run - and also because of the score - a certain amount of form was soon sacrificed in the game and play became disjointed, excitement sporadic. In 62 minutes the second of two hefty challenges on Hamish Macdonald, this one by Phil Macleod just inside the corner of the box, granted a glimmer of hope to United, but Jamie Feeney’s penalty was pulled well-wide of the recently-introduced Ross “Tiny” Maclean right-hand post.

It was 83 minutes before the next clear-cut chance arrived, this one fashioned by “Dokus”, just outside the Wasps’ box. As he moved towards the box, performing once again the obligatory Wiltford twists and turns, he unleashed a right-foot shot, which, though covered by Maclennan, glanced off the unfortunate Feeney to go high over the sprawling keeper (**0-5**).

Two minutes later United’s final chance came when a Hamish Macdonald free-kick on the left edge of the box, cannoned clear off the wall, allowing the Blues to break at pace. Buchanan carried the ball to the edge of the box, but Maclennan was out to block his shot expertly to his left, then “Gochan” whipped the rebound across goal and beyond the far post. Two minutes later Buchanan broke clear once more on the left, turned in, and shot from the edge of the box, but Feeney’s block spun out high to “Dokus”. However, his reflex reply went straight to the keeper.

Full-time: United 0 Carloway 5

"Weeping may endure for the night, but joy cometh in the morning". There were sufficient signs in the Blues' performance tonight to show that the patient is alive and breathing. Whether or not he will make a full recovery is another question. The nature and timing of the game obviously affected the appetite of the players for engagement, but it was a reasonably diverting spectacle to pass an evening - if you were a Carloway supporter, that is.

United's main problem was lack of pace up front which led to an inability to unlock a fully on-message Blues' back-line, with "D.I." especially focussed - if that's the right word. There were also frequent glimmers of the classic "Squegg" approach to delivery from midfield, and both "Dokus" and Jack Buchanan at times seemed to be participating in a private competition to see who could - 1: score more goals; 2: end higher up the Club's goal-scoring list for 2014; and 3: perform the greatest number of twists and turns before placing the ball behind their EaF team-mate.

In addition, the younger players had a chance to stake a greater claim for first-team involvement in 2015 - and Josh Harris certainly did, with one early storming run to the bye-line and the glorious de Boer which helped create the second goal.

United Man of the Match: Jack Maclennan.

Carloway Man of the Match: Donald "D.I." Maclennan.