

Lewis and Harris League :

Carloway 0 (0) Lochs 1 (0)

Robert Jones 52

At Cnoc a' Choilich, Carloway.

Friday, 17.4.14.

Referee: Stuart Macleod.

Stand-side line judge: Andrew Macleod.

Far-side line judge: Calum Murdo Mackenzie.

CARLOWAY.

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

Gordon Craigie

Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Domhnall Mackay (capt.) ■■ ; Norman "Taz" Morrison

*Kevin "Barra" Macneil Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Phil Macleod Billy Anderson Ali
"Laxay" Macdonald*

Jack Buchanan Kenny "Beag" MacIennan

Sub.used: Josh Harris (Kevin "Barra" Macneil) 72.

Subs.not used: David "Lurch" Murray; Joe Armstrong; Ben Smith.

Yellow card: Domhnall Mackay 86.

LOCHS.

Manager: David Macmillan.

Craig Maclean Robert Jones

Peter "Robbie" Mackenzie David Macmillan Robert Mackenzie Steven Price

Daniel "Nipper" Mackenzie Donald "Nomie" Macdonald Graeme Mackenzie Jim O'Donnell

David Black

Sub. not used: Andrew Murray; Gordon "Gordie" Mackenzie.

Yellow card: Peter "Robbie" Mackenzie 10.

After last Friday's prolonged war of attrition with Point, the last sight Carloway's depleted squad wished to see at Cnoc a' Choilich tonight were the maroon figures of the island's endlessly regenerating assassins, Lochs. Memories of last August's 5-1 filleting in this fixture are still rather raw down Carloway way. Granted, the Carloway squad was rather decimated that evening but the degree of that forensic evisceration must rank high on the Blues' "**Terrible Experiences**" list. Full marks to the Leurbost men for that display, which equalled some of the Leurbost men's greatest performances from the 2000s. Not a joy to watch for Blues' supporters, however.

Tonight, na Gormaich were still rather thin on the ground, lacking the services of the injured David Beaton, Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod, Lee Johnson, and Donald

"D.I." MacIennan, while future stars-in-the-making, Ross Maciver and Mark Macleod, did not feature. There was some good news: Kenny "Beag" MacIennan remained on the island and moved forward tonight to support ace hit-man, Jack Buchanan, starved of support, for understandable reasons, on Friday last. No doubt Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur, Domhnall Mackay, and Norman "Taz" Morrison were equally gratified by the appearance of the Makélélé figure of the imposing Phil Macleod, as holding midfielder before them, and this in turn also lightened the load on "Dokus" and Billy Anderson to block a formidable opposing midfield including perennial thorns in their flesh, David Macmillan and the Mackenzies, Robert and Peter Robbie. David "Lurch" Murray and Ben Smith both made welcome first appearances of the season on the bench, beside Joe Armstrong and the tireless Josh Harris, the latter a little unlucky not to reprise his role on the 10th.

Lochs themselves have not been immune to the exigencies of island life and the difficulties of maintaining a squad, season on season. Central defender, Ally Mackenzie, had finally called it a day, accompanied by the inspirational Calum Tom Moody, a fundamental cog in the Blues' Championship-winning side of 2013; certainly, both candidates for Lewis and Harris Hall of Fame status. Cameron Houston, Johnny Smith, Alan Farrell, and Calum Masson have also departed the scene, but with Dan Crossley out for the season, the unrivalled creative young player on the islands, Robert Jones, had enlisted from Athletic and roved up front beside Craig Maclean. Nevertheless, the Blues were delighted to notice the absence of class acts Andy Murray and Angie Campbell and the explosive presences of Peter Mackenzie and Don "Lava" Macleod in the Maroons' opening line-up; also, any attacking threat from the endlessly elusive Donald "Nomie" Macdonald was reduced by his partnering old enemy, Graeme Mackenzie, in central defence.

A beautiful setting greeted all present: little wind, and a low spring setting sun glinting the length of George "Spy's" expertly cut pitch, but surprisingly cold considering what a warm day it had been across the islands. Immediately, Lochs seized the initiative, and leant heavily on the Blues. Robert Mackenzie drove past from 24 metres in the 6th minute, but the first definite chances took seven more minutes to materialize, Peter "Robbie" receiving the diagonal ball from Macmillan clear on the left, then muscling his way behind "Barra" within the Carloway half. His attempted low cross, 16 metres from the bye-line, was blocked away for a corner by "Tiger" and when the cross came in Anderson, on the 6-metre line, by the near post, mis-kicked the clearance outwards, but Macleod, following up, managed to whip it out. A skirmish developed on the edge of the box, and Anderson, atoning for the earlier mishit, half-hospitalized Macmillan on the edge of the box, before he could capitalize. Macmillan's free-kick from the edge of the box came back off the wall. He followed up; again it rebounded, then Macleod hefted the ball down the park.

Na Gormaich were being pushed deep, as Robert Mackenzie and Macmillan

pushed; Jones roamed, trying to drag Mackay out; and “Tiger” lacked support following Peter Robbie and Maclean. “Taz” attempted to cover both. “Barra” retreated, and this inadvertently allowed “Nipper” extra room on the left to support; on the left, Macleod and “Laxay” chased/defended, midway within their own half, so Anderson and “Dokus”, as against Point, became sole creators.

Finally, in 23 minutes, “Barra” was cleared on the right, bustling past “Nipper”, and, midway within the Lochies’ half, cut square to “Dokus”, who turned inwards, then from 22 metres, hooked a left-footer a metre past Black’s left-hand post. A minute later an Anderson free-kick, from just inside his own half on the left touch-line, was reverse-headed square at Black’s left-hand post, 16 metres out, by Mackay, but Kenny “Beag’s” effort spooned on to the roof of the net. With the Maroons lying high, Carloway found space to break. On 28 minutes a Macleod clearance through the middle was immediately flicked on by “Dokus” in the centre circle for Kenny “Beag” ghosting on behind “Nomie’s” blind side to carry into the box, but a swift defensive recovery crowded him into a weak left-foot shot straight to Black from 16 metres.

On the half-hour the Blues’ chance of the half arrived. A high clearance from Mackay found Kenny “Beag” free in the centre circle in his own half to bring down *à la Dugarry*, then dispatch *tout de suite* onwards through the middle to “Dokus”, who in turn released forward to Buchanan, who took advantage of “Nomie” getting into a fankle by stealing the ball to race behind the line into the box. Unfortunately for the Blues, Black did a Craigie by shooting out, spreading himself big, and blocking the young striker’s drive to his left superbly.

Four minutes later Craigie had to look lively reading a sharply curving Lochs free-kick on the left-edge of the Carloway box, under pressure from Jones, before two grinding tackles by Macleod in midfield allowed him to move out of his half then try his luck from 24 metres but Black anticipated well, low to his right. On 37 minutes Lochs had their best opportunity of the half to break the deadlock, when Macmillan burst through the centre circle between Anderson and Macleod to supply Maclean moving behind “Taz” into the right of the box, but as Craigie came racing out, the forward lifted the ball high over the bar. After “Barra” was freed down the right by Anderson, his squared low cross, 10 metres from the bye-line, flew across the box, just out of Black’s reach, but without takers.

In the dying minutes of the half, Carloway survived two scares: first when Macmillan was sent free into the left of the Blues’ box but was felled by a mistimed “Tiger” tackle, only for the referee to wave play on, then when Jones was released by his captain into the right of the box, only to delay an instant too long and allow Craigie to rush out and block expertly to his right.

Half-time: Carloway 0 Lochs 0

The first half had had remarkable similarities to the previous match versus Point: Carloway on the back foot, defending well, looking for the quick break; Lochs repeatedly moving/shape-shifting, as of old; Macmillan and Jones endlessly

creative, the Mackenzies industrious, seeking to create space for that vital breakthrough. And it duly arrived in the 52nd minute with a sweeping move from central midfield, Robert Mackenzie hitting the perfect diagonal from the centre circle, between "Tiger" and Mackay and behind "Laxay", for Macmillan to run on to, then sweep a low square cross across the box, for Jones to leave the back-line behind him towards the far post and fire first-time, high to the helpless Craigie's left, from 16 metres (0-1).

An urgency now entered the home side's play as they committed forward to grab an unlikely equalizer, but this, in turn, granted Lochs greater opportunities to punish a more open defence. "Barra" and "Laxay" continued to lie deep, and this caused any Blues' surge to focus through the middle, and with Kenny "Beag" tending to retreat in the centre to assist Anderson and "Dokus", Buchanan was once more cast as Ben Gunn on Treasure Island.

In 58 minutes an almighty kick-out by David Black was within a metre of registering a wonder goal for the record books. The ball travelled the length of the park; Craigie misjudged his run-out to collect and was stranded towards the edge of his box as the ball bounced over his head, but it just cleared his left-hand post!

It was 68 minutes before a reasonable opportunity appeared for na Gormaich, a free-kick on the left edge of the Lochs' box being lifted over the wall by "Dokus" but flying straight to Black. Five minutes later another free-kick, this time on the right edge of the box, was curled well over by Anderson. On 76 minutes Robert Mackenzie and Price combined on the right centre line to free Jones down the right to the bye-line but his sharp, low cross was blocked outwards, to be met by the arriving Mackenzie on 22 metres. However, his low drive whizzed straight to Craigie.

In the 79th minute Mackay fed "Tiger", coming forward across the right centre line. His chip forwards and inwards found Buchanan, coming outwards in the centre, but his characteristic step sideways off his marker, turn, and shot flew well over. Then, a double escape benefitted the Blues: first, Jones managed to win the breaking ball, 22 metres out on the right, in a tussle with Mackay and sped into the box. From 16 metres he tried to slip the ball low to the right of the diving Craigie, but the keeper read him brilliantly and held with his right hand. Three minutes later Jones was sent free on the left behind the line, by a carefully-placed Macmillan pass between Mackay and "Tiger". Again Craigie was out to block the striker wide, but Jones caught the ball on the bye-line, took two steps back, then stroked the ball towards the unguarded goal. However, Macleod somehow got back to the line and flicked the ball onwards with his left foot across goal for a corner on the far side.

Then, right at the death, Lochs had their own heart-stopping escape, with Macleod sending a glorious diagonal right of O'Donnell and behind Price for "Dokus" to make the outside of the box on the Carloway left. Twelve metres from

the bye-line, he whipped in a low squared cross which whacked against the covering O'Donnell's right thigh, spun inwards and upwards behind a wrong-footed Black, smacked the outside of the bar, and was eventually cleared.

Full-time: Carloway 0 Lochs 1

For the second time in eight days, Carloway were forced, not chose, to play like an away side in Europe: absorbing pressure from a more assertive, cohesive outfit - which they did well; while awaiting the chance to break and create themselves - which they accomplished less well. Overall, like Point, Lochs created more, and clearer opportunities, but all three teams have shared the same weakness: an inability to capitalize, though na Gormaich can point to sterling performances from Gordon Craigie which kept the goals against the Blues' column to one in 210 minutes played.

Unfortunately, throughout this fixture tonight the Blues only created one obvious chance: Jack Buchanan's effort on the half-hour, brilliantly blocked by David Black and their closest "chance", if it can be called that, came off Jim O'Donnell's thigh in the 90th minute. Yet, strangely enough, in both games so far, no one has played below par. Everyone has performed creditably, though in certain areas, the finished product has been ineffective.

Tonight, once more, the back-line of "Tiger", Mackay, and "Taz" was faultless; Macleod was resolute as holding midfielder; and the midfield combative and occasionally creative, but Billy Anderson and "Dokus" were under so much pressure, the imaginative forward balls were few. Therefore Jack Buchanan once more was forced to operate as a lone striker, except when the aggressive Kenny "Beag" managed to battle his way forward between David Macmillan and Robert Mackenzie; and with "Barra" and "Laxay" being forced deep on either wing, lack of opportunities for the Blues was understandable and mainly came from the direct ball through the centre, which most times was easy meat for Graeme Mackenzie and "Nomie".

Carloway Man of the Match: Phil Macleod.

Lochs Man of the Match: David Macmillan.