

Lewis and Harris League:

Carloway 2 (1) Point 3 (1)

Calum Tom Moody 36

Ruaraidh Miller 22

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald 72 Sam Macsween 46, 84

At Cnoc a' Choilich, Carloway.

Monday, 27.4.15.

Referee: David "Spider" Macleod.

Carloway line judge: Willie "Dola" Morrison.

Point line judge: Willie Macaulay

CARLOWAY.

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

Gordon Craigie

Calum Tom Moody Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Joe Armstrong

Kevin "Gochan" Macleod Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Kyle Brunton Ali "Laxay" Macdonald

Jack Buchanan Josh Harris

Sub.used: Stuart "Gochan" Macleod (Josh Harris) 40

Subs. not used: Chris "Christy" Smith; Andrew Macleod; Graham Macdonald.

Three days after the forgettable late, late escape at Col Uarach, Carloway sought to ignite their misfiring season by entertaining the Rubhachs for the second time this season, this time on League duty. No doubt Point were still smarting from their unexpected dismissal from the ABC Cup, courtesy of a penalty shoot-out, on the opening day. Andie Murray was, of course, missing from their line-up and Donald "Spike" Smith and Andrew "Mowgli" Macleod only made the bench, but pace merchants, Ali "Wally" Maciver and Sam Macsween, still led, enforcer-general Elliot Rudall was in left midfield, and a strong back-line contained Stephen Kettings, dead-ball specialist, Alasdair Gillies, and creative anchor-man, Stuart Flower. Behind them, Alex Wright continued to defy the years, like Carloway's own, Gordon Craigie, their joint ages probably reaching three figures.

Graeme "Windy" Miller did not have his troubles to seek; they came clamouring at the dressing-room door. In addition to the long-term injured, Norman "Taz" Morrison and Billy Anderson remained off-island; Kevin "Barra" Macneil, one of the few successes last Friday, was unavailable; Lee Johnson was otherwise occupied, of course; and David "Lurch" Murray, Ross "Tiny" Maclean, Ross Maciver, and Mark "Cirbhig" Macleod did not feature. Extensive persuasion had persuaded iconic former star, Calum Tom Moody, to return, along with the explosive Kevin "Gochan" Macleod, and they were tasked with patrolling the Blues' right flank. Young star, Joe Armstrong, was entrusted with a potentially fiery début, combatting live-wire Macsween, Chris "Christy" Smith dropping to the bench, alongside Stuart "Gochan" Macleod, Andrew Macleod, and Graham Macdonald, the last making a welcome first appearance of 2015. With a tricky Coop Cup first round coming up next Saturday in

Lionacleit against Eriskay, it was imperative that the Blues generated some forward momentum and cohesion tonight and re-discovered how to take the fight to an enemy. With that in mind, the line-up had the appearance on paper of a move from the favoured 3-5-2 to a safer 4-4-2.

Another bitterly cold evening froze the small crowd, itself a reflection of the Blues' current travails, but at least it was clear and sunny and the *sneachd nan uain bheag* had gone, though the roads around Tolstachaolais and Doune Braes remained treacherous, after a blistering hailstorm an hour before kick-off. The hoped-for positivity and aggression, unfortunately, did not materialize; or at least, it did, only it came from Point.

Macsween and "Wally" required no warm-up and were immediately in the Carloway back-line's faces. Young Armstrong and "Tiger" experienced a torrid opening quarter-hour tracking these two main threats as the Blues' midfield struggled to determine individual territory and roles. In 3 minutes Mackay and "Tiger" combined to block the elusive Maciver, whizzing into the box on to a Rudall splitter, then a expertly-flighted Gillies free-kick from the centre-circle initiated a pinball stooshie in the Blues' penalty area. In 6 minutes Macsween sped midway into the Carloway half along the right touch-line, then squared to "Wally", who turned and played the ball neatly to Mackay's right, behind Moody, but Angus Macdonald had stepped forward a moment too soon and the flag went up.

Two minutes later Macsween was off again, wall-passed with Ruaraidh Miller, midway within the Blues' half, and sent a searching low cross into the box, 10 metres from the line, but fortunately for na Gormaich, Mackay read it, and pulled off a glorious sliding block by the near post, under pressure. The resulting Maciver corner led to yet another melée in front of Craigie, a strong appeal for handball, a returned ball from the right, and a Maciver drive a metre over from around the penalty spot. In the 12th minute another Maciver corner on the right was met solidly by Gillies, 12 metres out by the far post, but his header went a metre outside Craigie's right-hand post.

Carloway were floundering in face of a sustained assault. The Moody/Mackay axis was sound, but overworked; Macsween on the right and Maciver all over were elusive and impossible to contain, and the Blues' midfield invisible as a unit, though the old hands, "Dokus" and "Gochan", endlessly industrious. Once again, Buchanan and Harris were on their own.

Finally, in 22 minutes, the Rubhachs registered, deservedly, though the build-up to the chance was a trifle unlucky for na Gormaich: a Macdonald shot in the centre, 20 metres out, deflecting sharply right off Brunton and into the box, straight to the toe of a delighted Miller, who calmed himself, then fired a low right-footer past a helpless Craigie's right-hand (**0-1**).

Five minutes later, a Maciver free-kick, midway within the Blues' half, on the right

touch-line, was delivered Martin Peters-style to the far post, where Gillies reverse-headed across goal but Brunton reacted fast to head it away for yet another corner.

On 29 minutes Carloway woke Alex Wright from a deep sleep with their first attempt on goal, "Laxay" winning the ball in the centre on the Rubhach right touch-line. He advanced, then supplied "Dokus", 22 metres out in the centre, but his shot lacked power and the keeper held easily, directly under his bar. Three minutes later "Dokus", just inside the Point half on the left, delivered an inviting ball across the face of goal, but "Gochan" could not connect properly by the far post, 12 metres out, and the ball spun past harmlessly. In 35 minutes Carloway gelled cohesively for the first time when a flowing movement from the left of the Blues' defence, saw Armstrong play forward to Harris, who immediately flicked inwards to the running Brunton to chase into the box, but Wright was watchful and beat him to boot clear. The ball was returned by "Dokus", blocked out again by Flower, and Moody came bursting through to thunder in a shot from 24 metres, to which Wright got down well and tipped away to his right.

The Blues then surprised their fans - and themselves, no doubt – by equalizing from the "Dokus" corner on Wright's right, Moody meeting the ball firmly at the near post, 12 metres out, to head straight downwards to the keeper's right. Wright did get down to it but it had clearly crossed the line (**1-1**).

Half-time: Carloway 1 Point 1

Carloway must have been gratified (and amazed) to be on equal terms at the interval, after a first half-hour roasting. With the lack of options available, made even more difficult with the departure of Josh Harris with a hamstring problem, it was difficult to see what the Blues' management could do to suppress the Maciver/Macsween threat, and firm up a non-existent midfield, unsettled even further with "Dokus" moving forward beside Buchanan, and the inexperienced Stuart "Gochan" Macleod replacing him in right midfield.

The question immediately became academic anyway, as Point scored within a minute of the restart. A Maciver corner on Craigie's left dropped head-high by the near post, shot backwards off Mackay's and an attacker's heads and whacked into Macsween's chest, 8 metres out to the right of Craigie's goal. He thumped it in, but the keeper miraculously blocked it on the line, and as everyone gathered their wits, the young striker reacted first to charge in and stab the ball high into the net (**1-2**).

Moments later Maciver was free once more on the left on a Flower diagonal. He cut inwards and 18 metres from the touch-line, fired a low square pass to Macsween arriving on the right, but the pace of the ball deceived the striker and it thwacked off his toe and past. It took 58 minutes before Carloway managed to threaten when Moody fed "Dokus" moving through the centre and he, in turn, delivered a long-awaited golden splitter left to Buchanan, who checked, cut in, then sent an inviting ball into the Point box. Flower just managed to block the ball reaching "Gochan" and

it spun backwards high and just over the head of “Dokus” following up, 12 metres out by the far post.

In 63 minutes na Gormaich breathed again after an amazing let-off, when a Maciver corner on Craigie’s left was touched out, then driven in by Macdonald but thumped against the falling keeper’s back and shot off for another corner on the right. In 71 minutes there was yet another great escape, when Maciver zoomed down the right, then sent a low squared cross into the centre, 12 metres from goal. “Mowgli” met it full-on but Craigie somehow managed to push it away, low to his left. The ball ran along the bye-line, was whipped in again, and a following shot blocked away for a corner by Mackay.

A minute later Carloway took advantage of this latest stroke of good luck by stunning the Rubhachs with yet another equalizer. A “Laxay” run from the centre-line towards the box was brought to a crashing end, 20 metres out towards the left of the box. “Dokus” then exhibited his sublime talent at free-kicks by lifting the ball over the left edge of the wall to send it flashing just inside Wright’s left-hand post (2-2).

This provoked sustained pressure by Point, but the next real chance fell to the Blues, in 83 minutes, when Stuart “Gochan” won the ball on the Carloway right, then steamed towards the Point bye-line. Sixteen metres from the bye-line, he squared to “Dokus” on the edge of the box, but the striker was already falling backwards when he connected with the ball and his first-time shot cleared the bar by two metres.

However, the game was settled a minute later when the Rubhachs broke fast through the centre, Macsween ghosting diagonally wide of Mackay to his left and behind Moody to receive a perfectly-weighted through pass from Flower and hit a low left-footer perfectly from the edge of the box and just inside Craigie’s right-hand post (2-3).

Full-time: Carloway 2 (1) Point 3 (1)

After the Blues’ lacklustre performance display at Col Uarach, illuminated only by the sterling leadership of the indomitable Domhnall Mackay, with reasonable support from Gordon Craigie, Kevin “Barra” Macneil, and Kenny “Dokus” Macdonald, it was unfortunate tonight to have to face one of the early tips for the 2015 Championship, who were also eager for revenge for their undeserved ABC dismissal. Luckily, the Rubhachs displayed that same (and perhaps their only) failing so aptly demonstrated on April 10th: an infinite ability to squander cast-iron chances and leave outplayed opponents a continuing outside chance to claw their way back into a match.

Carloway simply could not get a hold of the ball in the first half-hour and regularly thereafter, and when they did, they seemed to play as individuals and/or give it away too easily, meaning that the back-line was continually under pressure and, despite excellent covering from Moody and Mackay and goal-keeping from Craigie, bound to

crack sometime. Joe Armstrong had a baptism of fire trying to contain an uncontrollable Macsween, while the problem of Ali "Wally" Maciver was never really addressed. Who exactly was to pick him up? A designated marker or whoever's patch he Wiltord-ed into? The defence was so pressured, the twin strikers so isolated at the other end of the park that they probably had to be introduced to each other in the dressing-room at the end of the game.

Pelé once characterised the England squad thus: "*They run about; they win the ball; they run about; they lose the ball; they run about; they win the ball; they run* ——" Na Gormaich's midfield resembles this at the moment: within themselves, none played badly. There was commitment from Kyle Brunton and Ali "Laxay" Macdonald; indeed, "Gochan" and "Dokus" played quite well. They simply did not function as a team and the Rubhachs were able to glide right through them effortlessly. Perhaps when weightier figures like Billy Anderson and Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod return, and the creative imagination of Dan Crossley, the midfield will gel and the attack be energised - but that is a long way off.

Carloway Man of the Match: Domhnall Mackay.

Point Man of the Match: Sam Macsween.