

Lewis and Harris League:

Stornoway United 0 (0) Carloway 2 (1)

Ross Maciver 1 min. 21 secs., 80.

*At Goathill Park, Stornoway.
Wednesday, 03.06.15.*

*Referee: George Macaskill.
Carloway line judge: Andrew Macleod.*

CARLOWAY.

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

*Gordon Craigie
Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Norman "Taz" Morrison
Lee Johnson Eachainn Miller Billy Anderson Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod Ali "Laxay"
Macdonald*

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Ross Maciver

*Subs. used: Phil Macleod (Ali "Laxay" Macdonald) 56; Kevin "Barra" Macneil (Lee Johnson)
56; Josh Harris (Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod) 82.
Subs. not used: David "Lurch" Murray; Chris "Christy" Smith.*

Tonight Goathill was the destination, on League duty, with Carloway no doubt mindful that last Saturday's Western Thistle/Dads' Army Select had scored more goals (six) in one Coop Cup round than their full squad had managed to accumulate in five League fixtures. Indeed, the Blues had only contrived to score eleven times in eleven games prior to the South End victory and, realistically, were out of any title race, having already lost at Cnoc a' Choilich to each of the contenders, Lochs (0-1), Point (2-3), and West Side (0-3). Only once (at Ness, 2-0) had the Blues won three points in five League starts. Just two years have elapsed since their only unbeaten League season which ended in Championship glory, but retirements, relocation, and long-term injury have occurred so frequently, that youth development and all-round regeneration has been outpaced.

So, tonight, na Gormaich desperately wanted to begin racking up the points and climbing the table. The omens were propitious, with Domhnall Mackay and Norman "Taz" Morrison returning beside Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur in defence, and Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald partnering Ross Maciver in attack. Thus, hat-trick hero, Lee Johnson, could drop back to right wing/half, with the promising Eachainn Miller retaining his place to his left. The no-nonsense defender, Chris "Christy" Smith, was desperately unlucky to be relegated to the bench after his Coop display but, fortunately, Phil Macleod and Kevin "Barra" Macneil were available and joined him, alongside David "Lurch" Murray and Josh Harris. However, there were no places for other successes from Saturday, Joe Armstrong and Stuart "Gochan" Macleod, nor, for that matter, Ben Smith, Mark Macleod, Graham Macdonald, or Euan "a'Ghuilc"

Macleod.

Games against United evoke mixed feelings: naturally, any fan wants his/her own side to win, but simultaneously most wish the Wasps well. Now that Carloway and West Side have ended their League ducks, many people would like the 1958-62 Champions to win a first trophy since the 1976 Lewis Cup - so long as it's against someone else! Their contribution to youth development on the island has been immeasurable, with many of island stars beginning their illustrious careers there, and again, tonight, they did not disappoint. The outstanding Jack Maclennan was to continue his heroics in goal, and the rest of the squad looked under the age of consent: lean, keen, and, above all, fast. Fitness and pace seemed destined to be a concern for the experienced stars of Carloway.

A further concern was Goathill itself which had a decided "*après le déluge*" appearance: heavy, deadened, and soft. A brittle western sun shone into the eyes of na Gormaich at the whistle but it did not deter them from immediately replicating their once-familiar explosive openings. In a carbon copy of Dan Crossley's opener versus West Side off Moody's 35-second splitter at Barvas in April, 2010, "Sqweg" won a breaking ball just inside the centre of his own half. He quickly looked up, then sent the perfect Charlie Gallagher over a hardly warmed-up United No.5 for Maciver to speed past him on his right. The striker let the ball run on towards the left of the United box, and as Maclennan spotted the danger and raced out to block, gave the keeper no time to compose himself by reverse-stabbing a first-touch right-footer past the surprised keeper to his left which trundled slowly into the empty net from 20 metres (**0-1**). Touré and Aguero couldn't have combined better!

It would be an understatement to say that everyone present was stunned, though United quickly reacted with commitment and pace in an attempt to deny any Blues' surge. However, after 7 minutes a neat 1-2 between Johnson and "Dokus" midway within the Wasps' half, on United's left touch-line, ended with the winger racing into the left of their box. Again, Maclennan was out smartly to block, the ball breaking inwards to Maciver 12 metres out, but his snap right-footer was swept inches over the bar. Four minutes later Johnson was supplied once more in the same position, this time by an instant transfer from Maciver off an Anderson ball through the middle, and again he made the left corner corner of the box, but his low right-foot daisy-cutter travelled across goal and a metre past the far post.

In return, United's pace and movement were testing na Gormaich, especially the wing-men, nos. 7 and Kevin Flower, but the final ball was their problem, which was often mishit or over-ambitious. The Carloway game-plan mainly consisted of Mackay, Anderson, Miller, and "Sqweg" liberating the energetic

Johnson on the right to strike or supply, or Maciver through the centre, with “Dokus” mostly adopting a withdrawn centre-forward role.

In 20 minutes Johnson was once more freed down the right by “Sqweg” and his squared low cross found Maciver in the centre on the edge of the box. He rode two tackles, moved forward into the box, then slid the ball right to the unmarked “Dokus”, but again Maclennan reacted brilliantly to get across and block “Dokus” low and hold. In 25 minutes another sweeping move saw Miller, on the centre line, find Anderson on his right, and he instantly played the breaker forward to the racing Maciver, who in turn turned the ball inwards to “Dokus”, 18 metres out, but Maclennan read his strike safely.

Finally, in 35 minutes, United created their first “*real*” chance, when Hamish Macdonald played an inch-perfect diagonal between Mackay and “Taz” for Kevin Flower to reach 18 metres from the bye-line, but “Taz” recovered well to block his low cross for a corner. Macdonald then met the resulting corner, directly in front of goal, 14 metres out, but got under it and his header flew upwards and over. Two minutes later Maclennan surpassed himself with an amazing double-block. A golden diagonal from Anderson, in the centre circle, sent “Dokus” scampering down the left behind Chris Dempster and Eoghain MacPhee. He reached 12 metres from the bye-line on the line of the United box, checked back and in a couple of steps, but Maclennan again blocked his attempt, this time low to his left, the ball coming straight out for Johnson to follow up, but somehow the young maestro got across swiftly to his left to block on his line a second time. The immediate clearance, long downfield into the right of the Carloway half, was gathered well by Scott Montgomery, who cut in and supplied Hamish Macdonald in the centre, but his instant right-footer, from 20 metres, was sliced badly and whizzed several metres past Craigie’s left-hand post.

In 43 minutes another chance arrived for the Stornoway side when a free-kick on the right touch-line midway within the Carloway half was headed clear by Mackay, only to be met 20 metres out in the centre by Grant Stewart, but his effort went straight to the goalkeeper. A minute later the Blues were cursing the Goathill woodwork for denying them the chance to swallow their half-time Bovril more easily. A break on the right began with Mackay finding Johnson on the right touch-line. He moved down the line, then supplied Anderson moving into the left side of the United box to twelve metres out, where he slipped a clever ball inwards to “Dokus”. For once Maclennan was beaten but the striker’s right-footer flew over him, thudded against the underside of the bar, down off the line, and was humphed clear.

Half-time: Stornoway United 0 Carloway 1

Both sides were suffering from the same ailment, in rather different ways. United's young-bloods were desperate for the ball, eager to contribute and to get forward, to make a difference, but as a group they lacked cohesion and, more crucially, how to deliver the decisive final ball. Pressed at the back by the running of Johnson, "Laxay", and Maciver, the Wasps, coming forwards, were forced wide as Carloway were combining well in the centre, while defending solidly. However, up front they were enacting a script based on *"Zen and the Art of Seeing How Closely You can Miss"*.

The pattern of play did not change, though the heavy pitch gradually began to take its toll on the ageing bones in the Blues' squad, as disappearing wingers started to get their heels clipped, and reasonable chances materialized for United. In 48 minutes a United free-kick, 20 metres out, on the left of the Carloway box, was flighted just over by Flower. Three minutes later "Taz" of all people had an opportunity to feature on the score-sheet when a deep cross from Johnson, on the right touch-line, 22 metres from the bye-line, broke outwards to the left off two defenders, but from 16 metres MacIennan executed another superlative fingertip save, high to his right.

In 54 minutes another Carloway surge down their left saw "Laxay" feed a Mackay diagonal onwards to Maciver. He won the bye-line, fought off two tackles, then slipped the ball across goal for "Dokus" to meet 10 metres out, but again MacIennan managed to throw himself along his line and block low by his left-hand post.

"Barra" and Phil Macleod now entered the fray, no doubt to inject fresh pace down the wings, with the latter soon getting on the end of a "Sqweg" free-kick on the right edge of the United box, in 67 minutes, but his header, 14 metres out by the far post, went straight up. Two minutes later another "Sqweg" free-kick, this time from the centre circle, led to a bout of head tennis in the Wasps' box, before Macleod, 16 metres out, to MacIennan's right, stretched back to perform a spectacular scissor-kick diagonally across goal but it was just a foot beyond the lunging Maciver's right foot.

In 70 minutes Hugh Morrison, fast becoming troublesome though the centre, released Flower behind "Taz", but his 14-metre drive from the left of the Blues' box was a metre too high. In 75 minutes Miller won the ball in the centre circle and his careful diagonal sent Macleod racing down the left touch-line. He checked back, 20 metres from the bye-line, and sent a high inwards cross for "Barra" to meet 10 metres out by the far post. However, MacIennan managed to parry his point-blank header outwards, only for "Dokus" to follow up instantly, but MacIennan grasped his headed attempt easily. Two minutes later Miller himself made the right touch-line off an Anderson breaker, but his sharp low cross was blocked a foot past the near

post by an arriving Seumas Maciver.

Finally, the clincher arrived in 80 minutes when Mackay and Macleod combined on the left to send "Sgweg" onwards to the right of the United box. He doubled back, before sending a glorious head-high cross, square across goal for an unmarked Maciver to race in and from 12 metres glance the ball neatly to Maclennan's left and into the corner of the net (**0-2**).

Immediately, the Wasps had two golden chances to make the final minutes "*interesting*". First, Morrison burst forward once again through the middle and midway within the Carloway half released Montgomery, to move into the box between "Taz" and Mackay, but his attempt went straight to Craigie.

United's best, and final, chance, arrived a minute later, and again it was Morrison who sent a first-rate Jimmy McIlroy to Mackay's right and inside "Tiger" for no.7 to reach the bye-line, then send a perfect low squared cross screaming across Craigie's 6-metre line. However, as Montgomery connected, "Taz" got a foot in, Craigie dived at their feet, and the ball ricocheted high to the left.

Finally, in 88 minutes, Anderson, in the centre circle sent a perfect lobbed breaker over the heads of Dempster and Maciver, but as the charging Ross Maciver controlled the dropping ball, it spun a metre too far before him, and Maclennan, anticipating expertly, dived on the loose ball.

Full-time: Stornoway United 0 (0) Carloway 2 (1)

So, despite sacrificing a wealth of missed opportunities, Carloway finally stumbled over the finishing line, though United's young side probably feel aggrieved that they were unable to rescue a point in the dying minutes. Certainly, na Gormaich seemed fated to end the game with only one goal scored, though in almost every area, they cannot really be faulted: Craigie/"Tiger"/Mackay/"Taz" were rarely troubled; the midfield contributed and were creative throughout, and Maciver/"Dokus"/Johnson moved well and placed themselves in the correct positions repeatedly.

Yet a combination of brilliant goal-keeping, desperate and committed defending, bad luck, and occasional carelessness thwarted them for the 90 minutes. The only areas that appeared to present any problems were, perhaps, a conspicuous lack of pace as the game progressed (exploited mercilessly in the centre by Hugh Morrison, and on the wings by Kevin Flower and no. 7, and a lack of incisiveness with the final touch, maybe better summed up by the cliché, "*trying to walk the ball in*".

Stornoway United Man of the Match: Jack Maclennan.
Carloway Man of the Match: Domhnall Mackay.