

Lewis and Harris League:

Lochs 2 (1) Carloway 2 (2)

Johnny Smith 41

Billy Anderson 28

Robert Jones 90+4 (pen.) Gordon "Tago" Macdonald 38

At Creagan Dubh, Leurbost.

Monday, 19.6.15.

Referee: Stuart Macleod.

Lochs line judge: Calum Murdo Mackenzie.

Carloway line judge: Andrew Macleod/Kevin Anderson.

CARLOWAY.

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

Gordon Craigie

Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur ■ Norman "Taz" Morrison Chris "Christy" Smith
Kevin "Barra" Macneil Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Murdo "Sgweg" Macleod (capt.) Josh
Harris Ali "Laxay" Macdonald

Billy Anderson ■ Gordon "Tago" Macdonald

Subs. used: Mark Macleod (Gordon "Tago" Macdonald) 62.

Subs. not used: David "Lurch" Murray; Andrew Macleod; Graham Macdonald; Lewis "Oz" Miller.

Yellow card: Billy Anderson 46.

Red card: Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur 55.

LOCHS.

Manager: David Macmillan.

Robert Jones Johnny Smith

Craig Maclean David Macmillan Robert Mackenzie Peter Mackenzie

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

■

James Macleod

Subs. used: Roddy Morrison (Robert Mackenzie) 34; Chris Mackay (Peter Mackenzie) 67; ? (David Macmillan) 88.

Sub. not used: Gordon "Gordie" Mackenzie.

Yellow card: Jim O'Donnell 71.

Carloway approached tonight's League game at Creagan Dubh with a greater spring in their step than they might have been expected to, due to the encouraging final hour's display at Col Uarach on Monday, and also the information that key *animateurs*, Andy Murray and Angie Campbell (back injury), would not be appearing in the Lochs' line-up. Ace striker, Don "Lava" Macleod, was also ruled out, but this welcome news was tempered by the return to the island of deadly front-man, Johnny Smith, to partner equal irritant, Robert Jones, in attack.

The reasons for Monday's second-half improvement were complex; possibly

a mixture of the unexpected arrival *en scene* of Dan Crossley; Billy Anderson and Kenny “Dokus” Macdonald switching roles; “Dokus” starting to take on the opposition, especially down the left; the creation of more space for “Sqweg” to unlock the defence; etc. It’s difficult to be certain; no doubt “Windy” had figured it out. Unfortunately, key elements of that squad could not réprise those roles tonight: Jack MacIennan and Calum “Dola” Morrison were, of course, ineligible, while Western Thistle had first call on Eachainn Miller, Stuart “Gochan” Macleod, Ross Maciver, Euan “a’ Ghuilc” Macleod, and Joe Armstrong, though Andrew Macleod did appear in the bull-pen, alongside David “Lurch” Murray, Graham Macdonald, Lewis “Oz” Miller, and Mark Macleod.

Phil Macleod was off island again, while the Blues’ personal Rock of Gibraltar, Domhnall Mackay, still carried a discomfiting leg strain. Thus Norman “Taz” Morrison was given the unenviable task of filling his rather large boots, with ever-present stalwart, Cameron “Tiger” Macarthur, to his right, and recalled at left-back, the ever-dependable Chris “Christy” Smith, who had a storming Man of the Match performance here in the 0-1 Jock Stein defeat in May. That evening had featured a real backs-to-the-wall performance from the Blues, unluckingly falling to a late Robert Mackenzie strike. Billy Anderson and “Dokus” retained their final positions from Monday, but, regrettably, Kevin “Barra” Macneil, a positive influence at Col Uarach when he started to run at Scott “Flapjack” Macaulay and Campbell Macdonald, had to be pulled back into Miller’s right midfield spot, with Josh Harris on the other side of “Dokus” and Murdo “Sqweg” Macleod. However, this allowed fans’ favourite, Gordon “Tago” Macdonald, to return as co-striker, to Anderson’ left.

Nevertheless, even without star men, Murray and Campbell, the League leaders and bookies’ favourite for the title still looked rather intimidating, with class acts, David Macmillan and the Mackenzies, Robert and Peter, all itching to set up the bullets for the double-barrelled shotgun of Smith and Jones to fire.

A windless overcast evening in Leurbost provided the perfect damp, warmish conditions for the arrival of Lewis’s least welcome inhabitants: *na meanbh-chuilleagan*; the midges. Na Gormaich do learn from the past, but they are continually condemned to re-live it, as straight from the whistle, they were compelled to take one step back and spread, as Lochs immediately settled into their traditional pass/move/pass La Liga-style, and forced the play aggressively. In 3 minutes Robert Mackenzie was sent down the right by a typical Macmillan diagonal from the centre circle. He outpaced “Christy”, moving inwards, and 10 metres from the bye-line, cut back to Smith, but “Taz” managed to block for a corner. A minute later Mackenzie again, supplied by his namesake from his right, fired in a low right-footer instantly from the right

edge of the box, but Craigie had no worries.

A sudden Carloway break in 7 minutes saw "Barra" find Anderson just inside the Lochs' half on their left. He turned and outdid Pirlo with a perfect low diagonal forward behind the stoppers for "Tago" to run on to in the centre, but 16 metres from goal, Macmillan appeared from nowhere to slide in a decisive right-foot to take the ball off his toes and onwards for a corner on the left.

In 17 minutes an explosive Peter Mackenzie run into the Carloway half saw the ball moved onward and inwards to Macmillan, before being played low between "Taz" and "Christy" for Smith to make the bye-line, but the angle was acute and Craigie was able to knock his low shot from 14 metres past his near post for a corner. A minute later Mackenzie burst forward yet again, this time moving into the centre, and from midway within the Blues' half he found Jones moving towards the edge of the box. The hit-man checked square inwards, but his low-right-footer lacked power and Craigie dropped on it easily by his right-hand post.

The home side were certainly controlling the play, but Carloway's facility at getting bodies back swiftly behind the ball, plus the industry and imagination of "Dokus", "Sqweg" and "Barra" to link with Anderson and "Tago", was yielding returns. In 25 minutes a carefully-flighted Robert Mackenzie free-kick from 24 metres did clear the wall but Craigie read the right-footer confidently and held to his right.

Two minutes later, a delightful move by the Blues ended with a corner to James Macleod's right. Between them, "Tiger" and Harris had snuffed out a Jones break on the right of the Carloway box, and Harris then steamed forward to supply Anderson, retreating to meet him. Anderson managed to hold off Graeme Mackenzie before supplying "Sqweg" coming through the centre. The captain immediately sent the Jimmy MacIlroy to "Nomie's" right, inside O'Donnell, for "Tago" to burst into the box, only for O'Donnell to block his snap shot. A perfect "Dokus" corner came in high to drop on the assembled ranks, 12 metres out in the centre, and Macleod had no chance as Anderson won the jump to head home strongly, high to the keeper's left (**0-1**).

This spurred the Leurpost men forward in numbers, Craig Maclean breaking down the left. Twenty metres from goal, he squared inwards to Robert Mackenzie, who moved the ball onwards to the right to Peter Mackenzie. His high swinging cross was headed onwards to the left by "Tiger", only to be driven in again low by Maclean, forcing "Taz" to boot clear in front of Craigie. A minute later a "Laxay" run on the left took him past Mackenzie and inside O'Donnell to find "Dokus", who in turn played right and forward for Anderson to move the ball rapidly forward to "Tago" moving right. He held off "Nomie",

then cut back sharply for the racing Anderson, but his instant right-footer from the edge of the box in the centre landed in Grimshader.

In 31 minutes Peter Mackenzie battled his way down the right to fire in a low diagonal, 20 metres from the bye-line. Smith got in front of "Tiger", to meet it 12 metres out by the near post, but somehow put it outside Craigie's left-hand post.

Seven minutes later, Carloway stunned the Maroons with a stunning piece of individuality from the old fox, "Tago". A deep "Nipper" cross, from 20 metres on the left, was headed clear strongly by "Sqweg" in the centre and gathered by "Dokus" midway within his own half. He controlled the ball, then twisted round to send a high Beckham breaker straight forward with his right foot behind the retreating line. "Nomie's" first touch wasn't clean and "Tago" robbed him at speed, 24 metres out, sped forwards and, as Macleod advanced, sent the sweetest of left-foot lobs over him from the edge of the box and just inside his right-hand post (0-2). What a peach!

But the delight was short-lived as on 41 minutes Johnny Smith emulated him when he was sent free by a perfect Morrison rightwards slip to break behind "Christy" and towards the right of the Blues' box, then crack a net-bursting drive, via an unlucky Craigie's hands, into the far side of the net (1-2).

Half-time: Lochs 1 Carloway 2

The first half was a perfect exemplar of an old-style Away Leg in Europe, especially if Don Revie's Leeds Utd. were involved: Paul Reaney/Jack Charlton/Norman "Killer" Hunter/Terry Cooper to hold fast; Johnny Giles to create; Peter Lorimer/Allan Jones/Eddie Gray to profit on the break, though Gary Sprake wasn't half as good as Gordon "Van Der Sar". From na Gormaich's point of view, there was little need to change the format, simply to ensure the strength-sapping pressure from Lochs didn't wear them down. The home team certainly had been inventive, unlucky at times, but had found it rare to have a clear sight of Craigie. The loss of Robert Mackenzie in 34 minutes with hamstringing problems hadn't helped either.

The "*near things*" kept coming: in 47 minutes a deep O'Donnell cross travelled over to Macmillan, 18 metres out, on the far side of the box. He squared it for Morrison to drive but his blocked shot spun upwards and back to Jones inside him and the ex-Aths man quickly hooked a left-footer at Craigie but it soared high over the bar. Three minutes later a Smith corner on the Carloway left was met by Mackenzie 6 metres out by the far post, but his header was deflected a metre just outside the post.

However, Lady Fortune has never really had any fondness for Carlowegians and two events in the next five minutes heaped the scales against success, firstly a rather harsh second yellow for "Tiger", for a Morrison trip, closely followed by the withdrawal of the eternally troublesome "Tago", though the latter was balanced by the substitution of the explosive Peter Mackenzie with Chris Mackay. "Dokus" stepped up to the plate immediately to hold the centre and inspire the attack, but the pressure had already become more and more incessant. The dismissal of "Tiger" also brought to an end an impressive run of fifty consecutive matches in which he had featured in every minute of each fixture, stretching back to the start of the 2014 season.

In 59 minutes a deep "Nomie" cross from the right centre line had been met by Jones, 14 metres out by the far post, but Craigie had managed to get his fingertips to his reverse-header to touch it past his left-hand post. Three minutes later a Maclean cross from the left allowed Mackenzie to cut-back from the bye-line for O'Donnell, arriving on the left corner of the Carloway box, but his attempt went high over Craigie's right. "Laxay" had now adopted "Tiger's" role, with Anderson dropping left, and it was 68 minutes before Craigie once more had to look smart to punch away an O'Donnell header from a Smith corner on his left, 10 metres out in front of goal. In 75 minutes Maclean played the ball back to Graeme Mackenzie, coming into the Carloway half on their right, and his high swinging cross could only be headed onwards by "Taz" for Macmillan to collect 16 metres out, but the midfielder, usually deadly in his finishing, lifted his measured drive a foot over the bar.

As the action became more and more frenetic, "Nomie" found Macmillan free on the right, just moving into the Blues' box. He immediately squared inwards, but though the ball was too far for Jones, it was gathered by O'Donnell, now a front man, 16 metres out by the far post. However, he pulled his right-foot shot well-wide of Craigie's right-hand post. In 83 minutes "Nipper" came forward on the Lochs left and into the Carloway half, before playing back to Macmillan to deliver a perfect cross to the far corner of the Blues's box. O'Donnell won it, before turning neatly to send a reverse cross to the far post, where Maclean connected, 12 metres out, but his header looped a couple of metres over the bar.

Then, suddenly, on the stroke of full-time, a glorious opportunity arrived for na Gormaich to kill the game when a "Nomie" header, inside his own half on Lochs' right touch-line, broke inwards for Mark "Cirbhig" to win behind Morrison, then roar off to the left of "Nipper" towards the Lochs goal, but just as the young star reached outside the right of the box and went to strike, the ball bobbed and his shot high and wide to Macleod's left.

As the Carloway fans checked their watches, Lochs continued to drive forward, and this led to a series of dangerous Smith corners on Craigie's right, dropped right in front of "Van Der Sar". In the 94th minute, once more he clawed the ball away, this time to his left where the ball was gathered by Morrison on the Carloway right, just inside the box. As he checked back to cross, "Sqweg" came in and Morrison went down, the ball breaking outwards to "Dokus", who immediately began to steam off down the left. However, the referee, on the far side, adjudged "Sqweg" had impeded Morrison and pointed at the spot. One can imagine the reactions of the Carloway squad and their fans. Anyway, Robert Jones became "*Mr. Cool*" himself to out-fox the ace penalty-stopper, sending him left before stroking home low to his right corner (2-2).

Amazingly, there was still time for yet another Lochs' corner, but Carloway managed to survive last-minute heartache.

Full-time: Lochs 2 (1) Carloway 2 (2)

It's a pity Malcolm Macdonald wasn't taking a break from counting the cracks in the Matheson Road pavement, to be present to add up the number of corners Lochs had here in the second half. It must have been some sort of record. Believers in "*just deserts*" will probably say Lochs "*deserved*" a point, if not a victory, and claim that Carloway did not "*deserve*" to win, while others will insist that Carloway were desperately unlucky with three crucial decisions: the dismissal of "Tiger", the controversial penalty, and the mysterious extra five minutes of added-on time. After all, every game has key decisions but they usually even themselves out, whereas tonight Carloway felt each went against them. In addition, others will claim that a team committed to attack at every opportunity "*deserves*" the "*luck*", while a defensive team, holding the line and hoping to seize any opportunity against an over-committed opposition, is less "*worthy*" in some way.

However, both require skills, and Carloway did not arrive at Creagan Dubh with a fortress-mentality, but were required to adopt this occasionally, then totally, when Macarthur was sent off. The whole notion of "*desert*", nevertheless, in football, as in life itself, is spurious. You either succeed or you don't. Both teams scored twice, so a draw was the correct result. Grievance doesn't change outcomes. Nor should all the furore over the decisions divert attention from a number of sterling displays on the night from Carloway's greatest servant in goal, Craigie; "Tiger"/"Taz"/"Christy" across the back; the endless commitment of Anderson; and an astonishing second-half tireless display from "Dokus", who also rivalled Dan Crossley and Billy Anderson with his classic forward ball that set up the irrepressible "Tago" for a goal which reprised his killer goal versus Kirkwall Rovers in July, 2011: "*a neat*

move on the left involving Crossley and Chris Macleod sent "Tago" ghosting in from the left. Again, the keeper was out like lightning, but this time "Tago" second-guessed him with the early lob, from the left edge of the box, and though the goalie touched it, he couldn't prevent it carrying on into the net"; only one of many great goals contributed by "Tago" over the years.

It must be recognized that these performances were realized against two of the greatest midfielders the island has ever produced in David Macmillan and Robert Mackenzie, while Peter Mackenzie on the right midfield/defence is No. 1 in any "*Ten Best Lewis and Harris Defenders of All Time*". Johnny Smith's goal was also an outstanding example in deadly chance-taking. Yet even though na Gormaich were under pressure for most of the game, they were never out-thought, or out-manoevred, or outplayed, and with a just a slightest smidgin of beneficence from the gods might have got there in the end - whether or not they "*deserved*" to!

Lochs Man of the Match: David Macmillan.

Carlaway Man of the Match: Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald.