

Lewis and Harris League:

## **Carloway 0 (0) Back 3 (1)**

*Chris Macleod 5, 84  
Stuart Macdonald 90+1*

*At Cnoc a' Choilich, Carloway.  
Monday, 06.07.15.  
Referee: David "Spider" Macleod.*

*Carloway line judge: Malcolm "Grapp".Macdonald  
Back Line Judge: Donald "Dano" Macdonald.*

**CARLOWAY.**

*Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.*

*Gordon Craigie  
Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Norman "Taz" Morrison Chris "Christy" Smith  
Lee Johnson Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Eachainn Miller Kevin "Barra"  
Macneil*

*Billy Anderson Gordon "Tago" Macdonald* ■

*Subs. used: Ben Smith (Gordon "Tago" Macdonald) 80; Kyle Brunton (Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod) 90;  
Stuart "Gochan" Macleod (Lee Johnson) 90.*

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

*Yellow card: Gordon "Tago" Macdonald. 63.*

**BACK.**

*Manager: Kenneth "Bugsy" Smith.*

*Scott Duncan John S. Macleod Mo Khalil  
Gordon Maciver Chris Macleod (capt.) ■ ■ No.4 Stuart Macdonald  
Domhnall Barden Craig Macleod Ali "Tolsta" Maciver  
D.S.*

*Yellow card: Chris Macleod 75.*

A fortnight's break was no doubt welcome at Cnoc a' Choilich, allowing na Gormaich time to clear a treatment room as crowded as Sauchiehall Street on a Saturday night. Domhnall Mackay had recovered from his ankle injury but the management decided to retain the back-line of Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur, Norman "Taz" Morrison, and Chris "Christy" Smith, so successful over the 98½ minutes played at Creagan Dubh on the 19th of June, and insert the captain into his preferred position in central midfield, nominally as a holding shield, although as the game unfolded, he soon metamorphosed from Claude Makélélé into David Hay. Lee Johnson made a welcome re-appearance at right midfield, so Kevin "Barra" Macneil was able to switch to the left, to cover for the unavailable Ali "Laxay" Macdonald; and young star, Eachainn Miller, replaced the absent Josh Harris to his right. Carloway's main problem, however, persisted: who was to score the goals? With Jack Buchanan now out of the picture and Ross Maciver unwell, and others like Andrew Macleod, Mark Macleod, Stuart "Gochan" Macleod, Graham Macdonald, and Ben Smith lacking experience, the burden was once more shouldered by ace veterans, Billy Anderson and Gordon "Tago" Macdonald, who also had featured creditably in Leurbost, each appearing on the score-sheet. Unfortunately, Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald,

outstanding in the later stages of the Lochs League game, was also unavailable, as was Mark “Cirbhig” Macleod, so Murdo “Sqwegg” Macleod joined Mackay on his right, as joint provider of the bullets for Anderson and “Tago” to fire. Ben Smith and Stuart “Gochan” Macleod provided the back-up on the bench, alongside the returning Kyle Brunton, David “Lurch” Murray, and Joe Armstrong. This was the fourth meeting this season with the Bacachs, whose troubles mirror those of Carloway, with a large-scale exodus of established key players in the close season, e.g. Andrew “Mowgli” Macleod, D.J. Macdonald, Murray Macleod, and the first 270 minutes had been less than memorable: the Blues had needed a last-gasp Mackay header to rescue an unlikely point in the corresponding League fixture at Col Uarach in late April, and in two subsequent EaF meetings the Blues had failed to find the net, exiting to two early goals in an away second leg three weeks ago.

Despite a reasonably pleasant, midge-free evening in the West, the relative fortunes of both sides were clearly reflected in the empty terracing. Carloway began with the advantage of a strong nor'easterly breeze, but the match hadn't even settled to an established rhythm, before Back surprised everyone, including themselves, by taking an unexpected lead. In the 5th minute, a perfect Scott Duncan corner, on Craigie's right, came over high across the 6-metre line and dropped perfectly for an unmarked Chris Macleod, just beyond the far post, to reverse-stab the ball back into the far corner (**0-1**).

Carloway refused to be deflected from their main game-plan, i.e. for Mackay and “Sqweg” to push through the centre in support of a combative Anderson, an inventive “Tago”, and roaming Johnson, but a “Tolsta”-led Bacach back-line managed to repel them competently till the 20th minute. Then a Johnson corner on the Back left caused confusion around the penalty spot before a mishit clearance sent the ball back to the wing-man. He immediately returned a diagonal ball low to Miller on the near corner of the box. His right-foot drive lacked pace, but carried through to Anderson, 12 metres out in the centre, facing outwards, but his instant right-foot back-flick was blocked on the 6-metre box, then cleared.

Ten minutes passed before a “Sqweg” through ball found “Tago” escaping his marker as he moved left to the edge of the box, but his delicately flighted ball cleared the bar by a metre. In 33 minutes a “Sqweg” free-kick just inside the Back half, out on their right, was delivered high to the far side of their goal, where Mackay came charging in to meet it perfectly, 14 metres out by the far post, and head the ball down and inwards strongly, only for it to bounce up sharply and be blocked clumsily for a corner on the Back right by the goalkeeper.

However, in 37 minutes the mountain almost became a lot higher for the Blues to climb, when Back broke sharply and Gordie Maciver made space for himself behind “Barra” on the Carloway left. Midway within the Blues' half, just inside the touch-line, he sent a glorious high cross behind the retreating line for the racing Khalil to meet perfectly, 12 metres out in front of goal, but Craigie somehow read his header, and clawed his attempt away brilliantly, high to his right.

A minute later Carloway were almost the team celebrating when a forward ball by “Sqweg” freed “Tago” down the left behind Maciver. He reached 20 metres out before sending in a low vicious diagonal across the face of goal. “Barra” managed to

edge in front of "Tolsta" to meet it 12 metres out but his right-foot side-foot attempt ricocheted off the defender and away for a corner. Anderson's corner was then met powerfully by Mackay directly in front of goal, 12 metres out, but his downwards header was blocked on the line by "Tolsta", then spun up and off the face of the bar, before being booted clear by Barden. The pressure continued and in 40 minutes a Johnson break on the right and inwards cross from the bye-line resulted in an incredible pinball melée in the Bacach box, before breaking to Mackay, 14 metres out to the right, but his thunderous right-footer soared a few inches over the centre of the bar.

### **Half-time: Carloway 0 Back 1.**

Carloway had solved one problem; the creation of chances. Not many, but at least a few that could, perhaps should, have been taken. Despite Chris Macleod's best efforts to lead by example, ably assisted on either flank by Stuart Macdonald and Gordon Maciver, Carloway had exercised a degree of control that might have been expected to deliver results, although it was telling that most of these attempts had resulted from the driving force of Mackay. Anderson and "Tago" were being played along the line rather than through it.

The Blues opened the second half with a flurry of intent to rectify this. An Anderson corner to the right of the Back goal was head-glanced on by Mackay at the near post across goal but Murray managed to brush the ball out for another corner on the far side before "Barra" could meet it. Johnson's resultant corner flew across goal dangerously, 12 metres out, and Chris Macleod, by the far post, was compelled to head high over his own bar for yet another corner. However, this initial push was soon dissipated by an excellently marshalled "Tolsta" back-line and a blocking midfield, which led to tentative balls forward from "Sqweg", Miller, *et al* being constantly rebuffed. In addition there was the constant danger from the pacy breaking and trickery of Maciver and Murray on the flanks, taking repeated advantage of a high back-line. With Anderson and "Tago" retreating and "Tago" and Johnson wide, na Gormaich soon seemed to be operating a 7-man midfield, desperately searching for the key to unlock a resolute defence, with Khalil and John S. Macleod behind them, waiting to surge from the halfway line.

In 67 minutes a 1-2 between Johnson and "Sqweg" on the halfway line saw the midfielder play the perfect diagonal inside Murray for the winger to surge down the right touch-line, then, 20 metres from the line, send across an inviting high cross which deceived the rushing keeper but was just a metre too high for Anderson, unmarked by the far post. As Carloway upped the pace, Johnson once more outpaced Murray down the right but his bullet-hard squared low cross, 12 metres from the line, came over too fast for "Barra" racing in at the far post. Two minutes later, it was "Tago" who played forward for the wing-man from just inside the left of the Back half but it was slightly over-hit and the charging "Barra" was again unable to catch the ball, spinning rapidly away from him over the bye-line.

However, the danger of a sucker-punch continued to threaten and a racing Maciver was able to escape down the right, then cut back to Macdonald on the edge of the box in the centre, but his left-foot daisy-cutter lacked power and Craigie was able to push it away to his left. Four minutes later, however, Back's captain settled matters,

when a scrambled clearance reached him midway within his own half. He fought off a challenge from “Sqweg”, then sped off on a twisting run towards the Carloway goal, between “Taz” and “Christy”. As a comet’s tail of defenders lunged after him, he managed to make the opposition box, then, as Craigie rushed out, slip the ball ever so neatly, low to the helpless keeper’s right (**0-2**). A brilliantly-taken opportunist goal!

In 88 minutes the Blues almost suffered more misery when a high clearance saw Khalil beat the offside trap in the centre to ghost in behind “Taz” and surge towards goal, but in his urgency to capitalize, he over-ran the ball and Craigie raced out to toe the ball out for a throw-in from the edge of the box. Nevertheless, na Gormaich’s nightmare evening was finally realized in added-on time when Maciver was freed down the left to make the bye-line, then cut in, before cutting back a perfect diagonal for Macdonald to ram home a fierce drive from 16 metres, low to Craigie’s right (**0-3**).

**Full-time: Carloway 0 (0) Back 3 (1)**

Many strange things happen in football but none stranger than tonight. On the face of it this reads as a rather solid victory for the visitors - and it was in the end - but it belies the wealth of chances created by the Blues, only to be squandered through careless finishing, excellent if rather desperate defending, and plain bad luck. Blues’ fans will argue that the last two goals were only possible because Carloway were desperately over-committed going forward as they frantically tried to rescue a point or three. Over-committed they were, understandable in the circumstances, but it still didn’t provide any extra golden in-your-face opportunities, and one might wonder who would have taken these extra chances if they had appeared.

Na Gormaich’s main failings this season have been an inability to create chances, but also a continuous failure to take any created. Tonight they solved the first half of the equation reasonably often but, unfortunately, became more and more inventive at missing out on the second half of the problem. Despite late heartaches, there was solidity at the back from “Taz”, “Tiger”, and “Christy”, and this part of the experiment can be seen to have “*worked*”; Domhnall Mackay certainly was a driving force in central midfield, ably assisted by the dogged creativity of the ever-industriousness “Sqweg”; but Billy Anderson and “Tago” couldn’t quite replicate the aggressive variability and unsettling aura which had been so effective at Creagan Dubh, and missed opportunities were more in evidence throughout, rather than unlucky misses. Indeed, the fans probably exited Cnoc a’ Choilich feeling na Gormaich could have played for the rest of the week without scoring.

**Carloway Man of the Match: Domhnall Mackay.**  
**Back Man of the Match: Ali “Tolsta” Maciver.**