

Lewis and Harris League:

Point 4 (1) Carloway 0 (0)

Elliot Rudall 17

Alistair Gillies 67 (pen.)

Sam Macsween 73

Stuart Flower 90

At Garrabost.

Friday, 17.4.15.

Referee: Calum "Chancey" Macleod.

Carloway line judge: Alasdair "Tiger" Macarthur.

CARLOWAY.

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

Gordon Craigie

Ali "Laxay" Macdonald ■ Norman "Taz" Morrison ■ Chris "Christy" Smith ■

Lee Johnson Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Eachainn Miller Kevin "Barra" Macneil

Fraser "Frazmac" Macleod Angus Grant

Subs. used: Billy Anderson ■ (Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod) 74; Gordon "Tago" Macdonald (Angus Grant) 74; Josh Harris (Kevin "Barra" Macneil) 80; Kyle Brunton (Chris "Christy" Smith) 90.

Sub. not used: David "Lurch" Murray.

Yellow cards: Ali "Laxay" Macdonald (serious foul play) 67; Chris "Christy" Smith (ungentlemanly conduct) 67; Norrnan "Taz" Morrison (serious foul play) 78; Billy Anderson (serious foul play) 80.

POINT.

Manager: Angus "Stoodie" Mackay.

Ali "Wally" Maciver Sam Macsween

Duncan Hunter Donald "Spike" Smith (capt.) Stuart Flower Alexander MacDonald Elliot Rudall ■

Angus Macdonald Alistair Gillies Stephen Kettings ■

Alex Wright

Subs. used: No. 16 (Sam Macsween) 76; No. 12 (Duncan Hunter) 82

Yellow card: Stephen Kettings (persistent fouling) 52., Elliot Rudall 90+2

Like Bill Murray in "Groundhog Day", Carloway seem condemned to

experience the same unpleasant experiences again and again. The sight of Ali "Wally" Maciver and Sam Macsween trotting out in Arsenal red and white to do battle with them once more must have been dispiriting, to say the least. This was the fourth of five scheduled meetings between the sides this season and already the opening day ABC victory in a penalty shoot-out at Cnoc a' Choilich seems several lifetimes ago. Since then the Blues have had to endure two home defeats - 2-3 in the League, courtesy of a late Sam Macsween strike, and a 1-4 thrashing in Round 1 of the HAC, and have yet to re-visit Garrabost on the 31st in Round 1 of the Moldova Lewis. No doubt they are thrilled at the prospect.

The 6-0 mauling of the Reds in September 2013 to clinch the Blues' first, and only, Championship already seems like an event that happened around the time of the Union of the Crowns. So Carloway's fitful season stumbles on, while the Rubhachs fly high, and Graeme "Windy" Miller has to endlessly re-wire a misfiring system, whose continuing problem is a chronic inability to hit the target. Carloway had not played as badly as the score suggests against the Bacachs and the late two goals had been a consequence of over-commitment going forward in a desperate attempt to rescue a point or three, rather than defensive frailty. But still the goals did not come that night - or they did, at the wrong end.

The first task tonight, however, was to contain troublesome opponents. Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald was still unavailable, but Ali "Laxay" Macdonald returned and was delegated to shadow main irritant, Ali "Wally" Maciver, to Norman "Taz" Morrison's right, while Chris "Christy" Smith was the obvious replacement for the suspended Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur. The surprises came up front where stalwarts, Billy Anderson and Gordon "Tago" Macdonald, who had contributed so effectively at Leurbost a fortnight ago, were relegated to the bench, alongside David "Lurch" Murray, Kyle Brunton, and Josh Harris, to allow erstwhile goal-machine, Fraser "FrazMac" Macleod, briefly back in Lewis, to partner Cove Rangers junior, Angus Grant, on the island for a month, up front.

A strong southerly failed to mar a beautiful, cold night in Broadbay, although the Rubhachs handed na Gormaich the first problem of the evening of facing into a glowing setting sun. Immediately Carloway were on the back foot. Maciver and Macsween roamed wide on the flanks, repeatedly dropping back into the *trequartista* area to entice "Laxay" and "Christy" forward, then bursting forward outside them at pace. With Kettings ever-eager to race forward on the right into any developing space, Smith appeared unsure whether to track Macsween or stay zonal to protect "Taz's" left and negate the Kettings threat, while "Barra" was unable to contribute frequently as wide man left, going forward, feeling obliged to retreat constantly in support.

However, it was ten minutes before danger threatened when a high Maciver corner from Craigie's left reached Rudall, 6 metres out by the far post, but he had to stretch outwards to connect, and his header flew a couple of feet over. In 13 minutes Gillies played the ball straight forward to Macsween, just inside the left of the Carloway half. He immediately switched the ball right behind "Barra" for Kettings to go charging down the touch-line. He made 10 metres from the bye-line, chased by "Barra" and the arriving "Sqweg", before sending a vicious, low, squared ball across into the centre which Craigie leapt out to paw away, but in the ensuing scramble, couldn't hold, and "Taz" was forced to boot clear under pressure.

An uncertain Carloway were struggling to contain, but surviving, just, when the lights suddenly dimmed in the 17th minute as a defining moment descended on our luckless warriors. A corner on Craigie's right was headed out centrally, the ball played back in, blocked out again, then switched right for Kettings to advance into the right corner of the box. He played a low diagonal forward across goal which somehow managed to evade a ruck of legs to blind-side Craigie and rap outwards off the far post, straight to an isolated Rudall, about 4-5 metres out, who banged the rebound high into the net. The flag went up. Offside, no doubt. After a conversation with the line judge which seemed to last longer than First Minister's Question Time, the referee let the goal stand. What the reasoning behind the decision was is unknown, though you may ask what is the point of a line judge. Only the referee - and Elliot Rudall, perhaps - knows the answer to that **(1-0)**.

In such situations, team spirit tends to plummet, while tempers soar, but as Jerome Kern said, all you should do is pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and "*start all over again*". After all, luck evens itself out, or, to put it another way, lightning doesn't strike twice - or so we in the West thought. To their credit, the squad buckled down to their task and, as so often happens, a perceived sense of injustice seemed to galvanize those afflicted rather than those who benefitted. Despite the continuing uncertainty behind them, the midfield gradually gelled and the competition in midfield between Miller/Mackay/"Sqweg" and "Spike"/Flower/Rudall became intense.

In 20 minutes Miller won the ball in his own half before supplying "Sqweg" directly in front of him. He instantly switched the ball right for Johnson to explode down the right touch-line and cut in a hard, low cross, 6 metres from the bye-line, which Wright was forced to boot away for a corner by the near post. However, danger still lurked at the back, especially on the right, as Alexander Macdonald supplied Macsween within the right side of the Carloway half, and he transmitted onwards the perfect breaker between Smith and "Barra" for Kettings to escape free down the right. Sixteen metres

from the bye-line he cracked across a low square ball towards "Wally" in the centre but the striker's instant connect flew well-over.

Carloway responded in 31 minutes when Mackay and "Sqweg" combined in the centre circle to release Johnson moving forward and inwards into the Rubhach half. He played the ball forward to Grant, making himself available in the right corner of the Point box, but Wright was untroubled by his low shot. Two minutes later the final "*real*" chance of the half occurred when a Johnson corner on Wright's right was met by Smith, rushing towards him to meet the ball, 6 metres out by the near post, but his glancing nod curled back agonizingly a foot over the bar.

Half-time: Point 1 Carloway 0

Na Gormaich might have considered themselves unlucky to be a goal down at the break, regardless of the circumstances of the goal, but they had spent the opening part of the half, struggling, at times unsuccessfully, to contain a better-organized, more tactically-aware outfit, and, ironically, had only achieved equality when a goal down. However, the last third of the field had remained problematic, though the Rubhachs had been equally unproductive there. The key had still not been found.

Immediately, however, na Gormaich had an opportunity to open their account when "Sqweg" played forward diagonally from the right of his own half to Grant, midway within the Rubhach half, and he nodded on behind Macdonald for Johnson to go racing forward into the right of the box, but Wright was alive to the danger and flashed out to block, 10 metres from goal, then block the second attempt from the rebound, before diving into the resulting melée to grasp the ball.

Surprisingly, perhaps, Carloway were gaining an early initiative as Miller and Mackay grappled for control in midfield and "Sqweg" found his range, encouraging "Barra" and Johnson to lie wide to break. For a time it was Kettings' and Macdonald's turns to mark. "Sqweg" had moved to central midfield, Miller in front of him in the triangle behind Grant and "FrazMac", forward left and right. In 55 minutes "Barra" broke left across the centre line and liberated Grant, diagonally forward left, and he immediately played a perfect back-line breaker behind Gillies for "FrazMac" to steam across Flower and roar into the left of the Point box, but before he could convert, Flower recovered and, together with Wright, managed to block the striker's attempt to the left of the 6-metre box. Moments later Mackay won the ball midway within the Rubhach half in the centre and played back to "Sqweg" in the centre circle, and he then delivered a golden forward breaker right-wards over the back-line's heads for Macleod to nip between Gillies and Macdonald on to it

and into the box, but again Wright was alive to the threat and rushed out to snatch the ball to safety.

Eventually, Point got their second wind and two minutes later Maciver was freed on the left by Macdonald. Before "Laxay" could get his foot in he sent an exquisite hard low diagonal inwards which was met by Macsween in the centre but Johnson, of all people, blocked his flick on the 6-metre line. However, just as the contest threatened to hot up, it was deflated instantly by more controversy. The Rubhachs broke through the middle with Flower finding Macsween in front of him. He returned the ball to "Spike" who played across the line to "Wally", in space on the left. He took off immediately into the left of the Carloway box, chased by his constant shadow, "Laxay", who seemed to get a decisive sliding tackle in to nick the ball away with his right foot for a corner. However, the referee didn't see it that way and awarded a penalty. The Blues' reaction was predictable; understandable, depending on your point of view. Fortunately, "Laxay" was not the last man as, to add to his anger, he was yellow-carded. Tasers were not required to restrain the Carloway players, only a notebook and pencil, and Ali Gillies remained cool to send the ball low to the left of the rightwards-diving Craigie, though dangerously close to the centre **(2-0)**.

The game was effectively over. Two goals can be clawed back, but not a gnawing sense of injustice. A minute later "Sqweg" did release "FrazMac" forward to race in behind Gillies but again Flower tracked back superbly to scoop his flick from 16 metres past Wright off the line and away for a throw-in. However, in 73 minutes, a thunderous "Wally" corner from Craigie's right was met towards the near post, 6 metres out, by Macsween and the ball cannoned home low inside Craigie's right-hand post **(3-0)**.

Point now scented blood as Carloway looked to the skies and clearly assumed bounce-game mode, though Mackay did find the newly-arrived "Tago" in the centre, just inside the Point half, and his sweeping diagonal sent "FrazMac" whizzing off behind Macdonald and Gillies into the right of the box, but again Wright came out to block his low crack to his right with his foot. Two minutes later Flower found "Wally" free midway within the Blues' half in the centre, and he in turn played on to Macsween's replacement, no.16, free on the left to move into the box. However, "Van Der Sar" reacted brilliantly to claw his attempt, high to his right, away for a corner.

Carloway's final throw of the dice came in 86 minutes when "FrazMac" robbed Angus Macdonald on the right inside the Rubhach half but Wright managed to block his low cross/shot from 16 metres with his foot. Four minutes later the Blues' misery was complete when Alexander Macdonald took advantage of an over-committed back-line to race through the centre,

but an alert Craigie pulled off a miraculous one-handed save of his high one-on-one to his right from 12 metres. However, the Rubhach recovered to retrieve the ball from the bye-line, and cut it back for Flower, powering in in the centre beyond "Taz", and he rammed the ball home from 10 metres (4-0).

Full-time: Point 4 (1) Carloway 0 (0)

It might be an understatement to suggest that "Windy" has his hands full trying to maintain dressing-room morale in face of challenging events like those that occurred this evening. Fortunately, the players appeared to follow Guus Hiddink's advice when confronted by the bizarre, and soldiered on, disregarding the surreal circumstances swirling around them, as they clearly did a fortnight ago at Creagan Dubh. This inverse Midas touch will surely pass; things must eventually cease turning to s--- when encountered and will start turning to gold once more.

The club's central concern remains, however: getting the ball in the net, though FrazMac was unlucky tonight to be facing a keeper whose eye - or foot - was clearly in in Alex Wright, the epitome of safe goalkeeping. The appetite was clearly there; a spot of fine tuning is all that's required, while Angus Grant showed sufficient neat touches to warrant "Windy's" indulgence.

Overall, na Gormaich edged the middle half-hour in possession and opportunity, after weathering an early nightmare of Rubhach spread, movement, and pace, before the penalty decision made the last 20 odd minutes academic. "Laxay", "Christy, and "Barra" had borne the brunt of the Point assault competently, and this in turn had eventually steadied an uncertain midfield, who then relentlessly attempted to supply bullets for the front-line to fire.

Point Man of the Match: Stuart Flower.

Carloway Man of the Match: Ali "Laxay" Macdonald.