

Lewis and Harris League:

Carloway 1 (1) Ness 1 (1)

Domhnall Mackay 19 (pen.) Micheil Russell-Smith 12 (pen.)

At Cnoc a' Choilich, Carloway.

Monday, 27.7.15.

Ref.: D.J.Maclean (Bragar).

Carloway line judges: Andrew Macleod (first half); Alistair "Tiger" Macarthur (second half).

CARLOWAY:

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

Gordon Craigie

Ali "Laxay" Macdonald Norman "Taz" Morrison Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur
Lee Johnson Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Murdo "Sqweg"
Macleod Kevin "Barra" Macneil

Angus Grant Gordon "Tago" Macdonald

Subs.used: Jack Buchanan (Gordon "Tago" Macdonald) 64; Chris "Christy" Smith (Angus Grant) 88.

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

Yellow card: Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur 66.

NESS.

Manager: Chris Macdonald.

In charge tonight: Murdo Thomson.

Jack Dunlop Andrew "Bubble" Macleod

James "Titch" Morrison Calum "Dola" Morrison Micheil Russell-Smith Innes Smith
John Alexander Maciver Domhnall Gillies Neil Morrison (capt.) James "Jambo" Morrison
Donald "Sweeney" Macsween

Subs.used: Ali Morrison (John Alexander Maciver) 86; Craig Harris (Andrew "Bubble" Macleod) 86.

Yellow card: Innes Smith 66.

No rest for the wicked, nor unhappy footballers either, as the Carloway boys trotted out tonight on home territory, wondering exactly how they had managed to let a Coop Final appearance versus Point slip away. After all, they just LOVE playing the Rubhachs, and this would have set up a **SIXTH** 2015 encounter, further to next Friday's Moldova Lewis Round 1. Saturday's first half is best deleted from the Blues' hard disc, but there were encouraging signs in the second half against Barra that there is still life in the patient, and how to nurture its regeneration is now the over-riding question.

Gordon Craigie and the emerging back-line of Ali "Laxay" Macdonald, Norman "Taz" Morrison, and Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur had coped reasonably well in face of repeated, racy assault, while Eachainn Miller and Angus Grant had demonstrated a constant willingness to confront aggressive opposition. Despite Domhnall Mackay, Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod, and Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald finally gelling in the second 45 minutes, and driving the squad forward, the undealt-with problems on the flanks had inexorably led to the final catastrophe.

Unfortunately Eachain Miller joined the still-missed Ross Maciver tonight in unavailability, together with unused Saturday substitute, Stuart "Gochan" Macleod, so "Dokus" withdrew to midfield and this allowed another star unlucky not to make the action on Saturday, Gordon "Tago" Macdonald, to partner Grant up front. Andrew Macleod joined David "Lurch" Murray and Joe Armstrong on the bench, along with the welcome presence of long-absent master hit-man, Jack Buchanan.

While Carloway's League form this season has nose-dived - with only eight points in ten games, to lie sixth - the Niseachs have had a moderately good League season, lying fourth, with 19 points from the same number of games, and, theoretically, still had a chance of the title going into tonight's fixture. Surprisingly, given the teams' relative form, the Blues had come out victorious in both earlier meetings this season, both at Fivepenny: winning 2-0 in the League in early May, and 4-1 on a penalty shoot-out, after a 1-1 draw in an ABC Semi-Final. So, different motives for victory: Carloway, another attempt to solve the equation and salvage some glory from a disappointing season; Ness, still the outside chance of towering glory, a first title since 1999, though they were runners-up in 2001.

A reasonably pleasant day in the west - suitable for gardening, if not sun-bathing at Bosta - had deteriorated slightly by 7 p.m., turning overcast, with a persistent nor-easterly chilling the bones of the diehards. The breeze marginally benefitted the Niseachs and the first realistic chance of the game arrived in 8 minutes, when Jack Dunlop's delicately-flighted free-kick from 22 metres in the centre tested Craigie high to his left but he touched the ball over the bar safely for a corner on his left.

Carloway had still not threatened when a gift from the skies - or the whistler - granted the men from Ness an early opportunity. Russell-Smith came through the centre, turning inwards off Mackay to reverse-pass to Smith moving through into the Carloway left and he transmitted it onwards to the breaking "Jambo". From just outside the box, the full-back played a low diagonal inwards towards Craigie, and as the keeper moved forward to collect, Dunlop

moved across him from his right to tip the ball away from him. The goalie made contact with ball and player; down the striker went. Aargh! Bit unlucky for Craigie, but why complain? Only Sir Alex or a Mourinho changes referees' minds. Russell-Smith then sent an absolutely unstoppable cracker low and just inside the keeper's left-hand post. A perfectly-taken strike! (0-1).

The Blues remained unfazed and almost replied immediately when "Sqweg", in the centre circle, played straight forward to "Dokus" lurking 22 metres from goal and he turned and swept a perfect breaker through the retreating line for Grant to ghost into the left of the Ness box but his attempted right-foot daisy-cutter from 16 metres was blocked for a corner by Neil Morrison. A minute later another Dunlop free-kick, this time at the right corner of "Van Der Sar's" box forced the keeper to scramble desperately to his right to block brilliantly for a corner a beauty of a ball about to creep inside his right-hand post.

Then Lady Fortune decided to even the scales by granting na Gormaich a penalty, arguably even softer than Ness's. Interplay between Mackay and "Dokus" saw "Sqweg" freed down the Niseach left, behind "Titch" and Maciver. He made the bye-line to deliver a high cross but it thwacked off the arm/hand of the covering defender - who was it? Smith? - and rocketted away for a corner. It was hardly intentional but perhaps it denied the Blues an advantage, so — . Macsween chose left; Mackay blasted it high to his right (1-1).

The game significantly tightened as Russell-Smith, Smith, and "Titch" and Mackay, "Sqweg", and "Dokus" locked horns, meaning that the endlessly running Grant, "Tago", and Dunlop were starved; Carloway's main *bête noire* from the North, "Bubble", being strangely subdued. Was he fit? It was 35 minutes before the Blues threatened again, "Barra" finding "Dokus" moving across and down the left. From midway inside the opposition half, he sent a high inviting cross into the centre of the Niseach box but Mackay's header from around the penalty spot went high over. Two minutes later another dangerous Dunlop free-kick, on the left corner of Craigie's box, was helped onwards by a glancing backwards header by Taz", 10 metres from his goal. Smith's corner came whipping in under Craigie's bar, compelling the keeper to punch straight out for a third corner, which was met by "Titch", 12 metres out by the near post, but his header went a foot outside.

In 41 minutes "Laxay" won the ball in his own half and steamed forward to supply "Dokus" moving into the Ness half, and he instantly lifted a delightful lob over "Dola" and Domhnall Gillies for Grant to race into the left of "Sweeney's" box. The young star whacked a low drive to the approaching keeper's right but "Sweeney" stuck out a leg as long as the Forth Bridge to block it away to safety with his foot. In added-on time, yet another Ness

corner, this time on Craigie's left, zoomed low across Carloway's goal, 8 metres out, amazingly escaping everyone to reach Dunlop just beyond the far post but the pace was too demanding and his lunging header went straight out.

Half-time: Carloway 1 Ness 1

As entertainment, the contest had sagged slightly after the penalty goals, mainly due to two combative midfields cancelling each other out, though "Tago", Grant, and Dunlop still looked lively. Both back-lines had only been troubled occasionally, and the keepers had to remain alert, not be inspired. Commitment and effort had not been a problem for either side either so it was difficult to imagine what both managers could advise to break the deadlock.

An early break saw "Sqweg" send Johnson down the right, but "Jambo" got back to block his low cross by the near post, 12 metres from the line, for a corner. "Dokus" then sent in a wicked corner from "Sweeney's" right which the keeper had to touch onwards and over his bar. Ness retaliated when Russell-Smith sent his namesake off down the left, outpacing "Tiger" to make the line, where his inwards square ball was reached by Dunlop who instantly whipped in a vicious shot which Craigie blocked for a corner by the near post. Four minutes later it was "Titch's" turn to be denied by "Van Der Sar" as Maciver's through ball sent him into the right of the Carloway box, but Craigie got down sharply to push away for a corner to his right.

The contest was suddenly livening up and in 70 minutes a Smith free-kick, whizzed across goal, escaping every foot, before a sustained period of Blues' pressure, led to "Dokus" being sent down the right by "Sqweg". On the right touch-line, 20 metres from the bye-line, he tried to find Grant on the penalty spot. The Ness captain reacted first to head clear but "Dokus" returned the ball. This time Domhnall Smith headed it out, and when "Dokus" returned it a third time, Johnson ran across the face of the line to meet the curling ball but his intelligent glance whipped a foot over the bar.

Two opportunities soon appeared for the Niseachs: in 78 minutes yet another Dunlop free-kick, to the left of the Carloway box, was deflected off for a corner to Craigie's left and when the corner was headed onwards and out towards the Ness left, "Bubble" gathered, then crossed back in. The ball was returned to him; he tried again; again it was returned, so this time he rushed forward to drive at goal from the edge of the box but his attempt flashed a metre wide and high past the Blues' right-hand post.

In 83 minutes a "Dokus" corner on Ness's left broke outwards towards Johnson on the left edge of "Sweeney's" box. He turned to his right then

whipped round to send a reverse right-footer a metre past “Sweeney’s” right-hand post. Two minutes later Russell-Smith turned rightwards off Mackay to release Smith breaking into the Blues’ half on their left. His high cross picked out Dunlop, moving into the right of Craigie’s box, but his well-met header went a metre outside his near post. In the 89th minute “Titch” was sent into the right of the Carloway half by the tireless Russell-Smith, but as the retreating defence gave him room, he pulled his low shot from 20 metres well-wide of the Blues’ right-hand post.

The final real chance was provided by the most effective forward on the night, Jack Dunlop, when Russell-Smith sent him racing into the Carloway right. Midway within the half, he hoisted a high cross ball, which Harris met perfectly 16 metres from goal on the far side, but his first-time volley disappeared in the direction of Barvas.

Full-time: Carloway 1 (1) Ness 1 (1)

A rather dull first 45 minutes led into an entertaining, spirited second-half encounter, in which both sides had numerous opportunities to clinch the three points, though very few real, head-on chances. Both sides retained a cohesive shape throughout, resisting any opposition pressure easily most of the time, and this, of course, restricted sights of goal, but left the feeling that if it had not been for the fortuitous awards of both penalties, neither side would ever have scored, even if they were still playing at present. Fortunately for na Gormaich, there seemed no sign of any hang-over from the gut-wrenching events in Benbecula, and as ever, Domhnall Mackay led the charge to gain a first victory since June 3rd.

For all the generally competent, enthusiastic displays all round - something absent in certain quarters from the first-half in Lionacleit - Carloway were never able to get “full-on” Morrison/Morrison/Smith/ and Maciver, because of the aggressive creativity of Micheil Russell-Smith, the relentless movement of Innes Smith and “Titch” Morrison, and the troublesome elusiveness of Jack Dunlop. The main plusses tonight for the Blues tonight, however, were a rediscovered spirit and appetite for the fray; an early establishment and retention of shape; and pace and hunger for the ball up front.

Carloway Man of the Match: Norman “Taz” Morrison.
Ness Man of the Match: Jack Dunlop.