

Lewis and Harris League:

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

Archie "Statto" MacDonald 64 Alex Macdonald 22  
Andrew Murray 31  
Alistair Gillies 34

At Cnoc a' Choilich, Carloway.  
Saturday, 7th May, 2016. 19.00.  
Ref.: George Macaskill.  
Carloway line judge: Calum "Cobby" Macleod.

**CARLOWAY:** 4-5-1

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.  
Asst. Managers: Kenny "Noley" MacLennan; "Gus" Maciver.

Gordon Craigie

Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Ali "Laxay" Macdonald Domhnall Mackay (capt.) ■ Chris  
"Christy" Smith

Jake Allan Kevin "Barra" Macneil ■ Dan Crossley Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod Archie  
"Statto" MacDonald

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald

Subs. used: Kenny "Beag" MacLennan (Dan Crossley) 62; Callum Mackay (Chris "Christy"  
Smith) 78.

Subs. not used: Ross "Tiny" Maclean; Joe Armstrong; Andrew Macleod.

Yellow cards: Kevin "Barra" Macneil 18; Domhnall Mackay 86.

**POINT:** 4-4-2.

Manager: Angus "Stoodie" Mackay.

Ali "Wally" MacIver Andrew Murray

Alex Macdonald Donald "Spike" Smith (capt.) Elliot Rudall ■ Hugh Morrison

Alec Lamb Alistair Gillies Angus Macdonald Stephen Campbell

Ally Lamont

Yellow card: Elliott Rudall 89.

After the nerve-jangling excitement of two stunning Cup victories, the Blues had to focus on the humdrum quest for League points, almost as rare as blue whales around Cnoc a' Choilich in 2015. Already the Blues were three points off the pack, courtesy of the windswept 1-2 reverse at Lower Barvas twelve days ago. Three points don't seem a lot, but in an 8-club League, in which each team only performs 14 times, ANY defeat is a major blow, unless there is a season like that in this year's English Premiership, where everyone starts beating everyone else (except the Foxes), but that is unlikely in Lewis.

Nevertheless, the Blues did not flinch against the Siarachs and only lost out, due to two well-taken goals by Luke Mackay and Martainn Shields. Also, in their other performances so far, they have displayed efficient, bone-hard commitment, grinding their way through two arduous triumphs in the ABC over United, 4-0, and Ness, 3-1, before last Friday's tumultuous Clash of the Titans Cup win over the Siarachs. Next, they had to dig deep in the Jock Stein, having lost their way following a 3-0 first-half romp, in order to recover

with an 89th minute winner from star hitman, Jake Allan.

However, exhilarating though Cup wins might be, the quality of a squad is usually judged on their season's League performances. Amazingly, Carloway only won one League game at home last season, on the very last day, 2-1 versus Athletic, and only recorded two home wins overall in 90 minutes, the other being the 6-3 Coop Cup victory over Southend at the end of May.

A glance back to 2015's confrontations with the reigning League Runners-Up and Jock Stein Cup holders was hardly uplifting. Despite a penalty shoot-out victory over the Rubhachs in the ABC on Day One, mainly due to a bravura performance between the sticks by Gordon Craigie, na Gormaich suffered serious embarrassment in their meetings with the Rubhachs. The subsequent home League game witnessed Point largely outplaying the home side, but squandering chance after chance, before emerging victorious 3-2, thanks to an 84th minute Macsween strike. It got considerably worse 11 days later at Cnoc a' Choilich with a sound 4-1 thumping in the HAC. In the League return at Garrabost in mid-July Craigie once more had to pick the ball out of his net four times. However, the crowning indignity for the Blues was their 1-6 mauling in their final visit of the season to Point, in the Lewis Cup Round 1.

This season the Rubhachs have fallen victim to that disease which afflicts all island sides, with the departure of three fundamental cogs in the 2015 Rubhach powerhouse: star stopper, Stuart Flower, and elusive speed merchant, Sam Macsween, to Canada, and powerful right-wing-back, Stephen Kettings, to job commitments in Glasgow. However, twin enforcers, Donald "Spike" Smith and the guy the Blues love to hate, Elliot Rudall, were still there to set up the bullets for perennial pains-in-the-neck, Alex Macdonald, Ally "Wally" Macliver, and Andie Murray.

Unfortunately for the Blues, squad injuries were already playing havoc with team selection: Eachain Miller (ankle) and "D.I." (knee) were not ready to return, while Ross Maciver's hamstring ruled him out. Therefore, "Laxay" was moved inside beside Mackay, with "Christy" at left-back, while "Sqweg" replaced Miller in a reversion to a 4-4-2 line-up.

Friday's promise of summer had largely disappeared on a bitterly cold evening, cursed by a return of a powerful easterly. However, the Rubhachs did not need its assistance to dominate proceedings immediately. As na Gormaich struggled to coordinate their revised line-up, Point's pace and movement left them floundering, with "Spike" and Rudall first to every ball in the centre, ignoring the Blues' midfield, and playing early, forward to "Wally" and wide to Morrison.

In 8 minutes two Point corners forced Craigie to palm the second outwards from under his bar. As the ball passed him, Rudall spun backwards to return an overhead kick from 16 metres which just crept past Carloway's left-hand post. Two minutes later Rudall supplied the ball from the centre line to "Wally" and as he tricked his way forward to the edge of the box, he drew a cloud of opponents towards him, before slipping the sweetest of weighted passes

diagonally right for Murray to glide in unmarked, but “Laxay” appeared from nowhere to block the ball away.

On 13 minutes an identical move freed Rudall to move in on the right. He hit it well but too close to the keeper and Craigie beat it away to his right. In 20 minutes a powerful Gillies free-kick from the centre line was carried by the wind, took a savage click off a defender’s heel, and whizzed onwards, but a metre outside the Blues’ right-hand post.

At this stage, apart from “Tiger”/“Laxay”/Mackay, na Gormaich were functioning as individuals, the midfield absent as a cohesive unit, and an uncertainty soon spread throughout the side as to specific roles. The pace and directness of Point were exploiting the *trequartista* area mercilessly and they pushed down the right repeatedly. The opener finally arrived in the 22nd minute when Macdonald supplied Morrison racing forward behind Smith on the right touch-line. As “Laxay” moved right to cover, the wing-man squared a fast low ball along the line of the box for the arriving Macdonald to gather, unhindered, then sweep a perfect, low left-footer neatly into Craigie’s bottom left-hand corner **(0-1)**.

It was the half-hour before Carloway first threatened Lamont, who, until then might have been watching “*Michael McIntyre’s Big Show*” on his iPad. Crossley played right on the centre line for Allan to move forward along the right touch-line, then deliver a glorious sweeping diagonal high across goal towards the far corner of the box. “Dokus” gained possession, checked inwards, then fired in a low daisy-cutter from 16 metres which the keeper parried away to his left.

It was only a moment’s respite as Point broke fast down the left and sent in the early ball from midway within the Blues’ half. The wind carried it long but Morrison caught it on their right bye-line, then whipped it back in square. On the 6-metre line, in front of goal, “Laxay” tried to whip it out but miscued, and as the ball spun back, Murray arrived to bundle it home **(0-2)**.

Three minutes later the hare finally left the tortoise far behind. when a “Wally” corner from the Rubhach left harnessed the wind perfectly to swing in high under Craigie’s bar and Gillies was on hand to head strongly against the underside of the bar, the ball thwacking down on to the line, then up into the roof of the net **(0-3)**.

A “Sqweg” free-kick from midway on the right of the centre circle which flew harmlessly past was all that Carloway could muster as Point continued to control, move, and set up the chances. In 41 minutes more “Wally” trickery on the left, outside the Carloway box, allowed him to leave “Barra” behind, then slip effortlessly forward between “Tiger” and Mackay but from 20 metres he drove straight at “Van Der Sar”.

**Half-time: Carloway 0 Point 3**

As a unit Carloway didn’t exist, though the players were competing fiercely. Jake Allan and “Statto” were combative; Crossley was imaginative, energetic,

but on his own, while “Barra” endlessly tried to find his role. Mackay and “Tiger” were dogged as usual, but “Laxay” seemed uncertain, whether to stay in the centre or gravitate left, to his comfort area, to support “Christy”. The power of Rudall and “Spike” and the pace of the Point breaks they inspired by-passed the studied creativity of “Sqweg”, while the intuitive skill of Maciver, abetted by Alex Macdonald and Murray, was uncontainable. “Dokus” was a solitary figure up front.

The ordeal continued. An initial flurry by Carloway gained a free-kick, 20 metres from Lamont and to the left. “Dokus” flighted it well over the wall, but Rudall, on the goal-line towards their left-hand post, headed clear. Three minutes later the Point midfielder broke on the left and made the Carloway box. His sharp, low ball was met in the centre by Macdonald, 12 metres from goal, but Craigie read it brilliantly, to push his attempt away for a corner, low to his right.

There was no respite for the Blues. In 55 minutes an exquisite Charlie Gallagher from “Wally”, straight forward between “Tiger” and Mackay, released Macdonald but Craigie did well to block his effort from 20 metres off to his left. The spinning ball was caught on the far bye-line, then chipped back over the Carloway goal where it struck the inside of the far post and was then booted clear by Mackay.

In 63 minutes the Blues created their best move, progressing out from the right of their defence, with fast forward passing from “Tiger” to “Dokus”, just inside the Carloway half, across the centre line to “Sqweg”, then swiftly forward and left for “Statto” to coast forward unmarked into the left of the box, but the ball bobbed as he struck it and the ball spiralled off high to the right into the Oakleys' front garden. A minute later na Gormaich's most enterprising attackers made the score-line marginally more respectable. As “Barra” and “Sqweg” combined in midfield to send Allan down the right. From the right-hand corner flag he managed a high, missile-like cross for Carloway's best header of the ball to bullet the ball high into the centre of the net from 10 metres (1-3).

Moments later, “Wally” almost spoiled the celebrations, as sent free by Rudall towards the left of na Gormaich's box, he cracked in a hot potato that Craigie did well to grasp at the second attempt. In 73 minutes a mishit Lamont goal-kick was met by “Dokus”, 24 metres out on the right, but his fast supply forward to Allan, saw the wing-man's early shot from 20 metres saved low to the keeper's right.

The contest was clearly running down, though Morrison, who'd been a consistent thorn in the flesh to the Carloway boys on the right, now on the left, made the 18-metre line, but Craigie was alert to save low to his left. In 84 minutes it was “Wally's” turn to test “Van Der Sar”, from 20 metres on the left, and this time the veteran could only touch onwards on to the face of his bar and away.

In the final minute Kenny “Beag” tried his luck from the edge of the box.

Lamont blocked low outwards but couldn't hold, and Callum Mackay, following up, had a chance from 10 metres to open his account for the club but shot straight at the fallen keeper. The game ended with Elliot acquiring his standard yellow card. He collects them.

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

At Ipswich Town, there was an old adage that recounted that the chairman drank a bottle of champagne when they won. When they lost, he drank two bottles and thought they'd won. Perhaps the bar at the Doune Braes was packed after this. How best to describe this? First, the excuses. Clearly, some players are more fundamental to the project than we thought. Without "D.I." there seemed to be a gaping hole in central defence. "Laxay" tried his hardest - his commitment is never in doubt - but still seemed uncomfortable, out of position, and always looking left, to help the embattled "Christy", who did not have a comfortable evening. Likewise, the absence of Miller was crucial tonight. Firstly, Dan Crossley tried to perform twice as much as normal but, ironically, this made him half as effective. Too much pressure can be placed on individuals, like Crossley in midfield, Mackay in central defence, that eventually their fitness and application may be compromised. Secondly, Miller's pace is clearly a necessary ingredient in the mix in midfield.

A contest like this allowed no time to think, to dwell on the ball. "Sqweg", and "Dokus" were isolated because there was no time to hold the ball, then act. Class *animateurs* like Crossley and Miller - or Billy Anderson, Andy Murray, etc. in their prime - like Gascoigne or Pirlo or Dele Alli, do not need this time. Their overview of movement around them exceeds the pace of the surrounding game, and they send the early ball onwards. It's not necessarily based on youth or fitness, just the way different players approach tasks. "Dokus" was ineffective up front, mainly because he rarely received the ball unless he went looking for it, but also because a measured, delicate approach to forward movement was out of the question due to the whirlwind of activity that engulfed him. With Rudall and "Spike" closing down his avenues of supply for most of the game, "Dokus" continually had to retreat, in search of the ball. Carloway's options are limited because of their small squad, but, perhaps, now that the League is a long shot, the young-bloods - "Tiny", Joe Armstrong, Andrew Macleod, etc.- need a stage to present their claims for inclusion.

**Point Man of the Match: Elliot Rudall.**

**Carloway Man of the Match: Domhnall Mackay.**