

Lewis and Harris League:

Back 2 (0) Carloway 0 (0)

Chris Stone 63

Joel Martin 83

At Col Uarach, 19.00.

Monday, 9.5.16.

Ref.: Neil Macritchie.

Carloway line judge: Donald "D.I." MacIennan (first half); Dan Crossley (second half).

CARLOWAY: 4-5-1.

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

Asst. Managers: Kenny "Noley" MacIennan; "Gus" Maciver.

Gordon Craigie

Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Calum Tom Moody Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Ali "Laxay" Macdonald

Jake Allan Kevin "Barra" Macneil Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod Kenny "Beag" MacIennan

Archie "Statto" MacDonald

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald

Subs. used: Ross Maciver (Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod) 60; Callum "Beag" Mackay (Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur) 73.

Subs. not used: Ross "Tiny" Maclean; Joe Armstrong; Chris "Christy" Smith.

Yellow cards: Jake Allan 75; Archie "Statto" MacDonald 78.

Not the yellow brick road, as seemed likely at one point, just a long and weary one, for the ever-diminishing members of Carloway's squad to Col Uarach for the club's second meeting in five days, with yet another to follow on Friday in Round 1 of the Highland Amateur Cup. Every victory is welcome, for squad morale if nothing else, but Monday's 4-3 triumph in the Jock Stein had come at quite a cost. Eachainn Miller and Donald "D.I." MacIennan were still ruled out and Dan Crossley was suffering from knee problems, although all three hoped to return for Friday's Cup showdown. However, even if they do, this has to be balanced against the projected absence of four others, including Ali "Laxay" Macdonald, on weekend stag party duty! Also, emerging hitman, Ross Maciver, was still only deemed fit enough to start on the bench, alongside Ross "Tiny" Maclean, Joe Armstrong, Callum "Beag" Mackay, and Chris "Christy" Smith.

Like Henry V's "*happy few*"; the Blues' numbers keep getting fewer. The management's options were increasingly limited. Saturday's line-up had not gelled, with "Laxay's" effectiveness lost on the left, as he covered for the absent "D.I.", and the midfield lacking cohesion and space with Crossley missing his fellow *animateur*. "Dokus", in turn, without a supply, could not create a presence up front and increasingly retreated into the *trequartista* area in search of the ball. What to do? An astonishing re-appearance, or come-back, surprised the fans, as former great, Calum Tom Moody, dropped from the heavens to slot in, or jetted in from Tenerife, as a "*Trialist*" beside Captain Marvel, Domhnall Mackay, in central defence, while Kenny "Beag" MacIennan, back on the island, added pace and drive in central midfield from the start in a continuation of the 4-5-1 line-up.

Footballing aside, it was an amazing sun-kissed, wind-free evening in Coll, to cap an unbelievably tropical day in Lewis, a temperature of 24.5° being recorded in An Taobh Tuath in Callanish this afternoon. Unfortunately, the football didn't match the weather. From the start, it was clear that both back-lines were in control: "Tiger"/Moody/Mackay/"Laxay" and "D.J.Macdonald/ Jason Macleod/Ali "Tolsta" Maciver/ Cameron Macdonald, although the latter line was altered later.

Carloway did open brightly, gaining a corner on their right in 3 minutes. A perfect "Dokus" in-swinger was met by "Barra" 10 metres out in the centre, but his header looped a couple of feet over the bar. Three minutes later a "Dokus" free-kick, 20 metres out and to the right, had to be headed away by the near post for another corner. A minute later Stone won a breaking ball in the centre to have a go for Back from 24 metres but his reasonably-paced shot went straight to Craigie. In 9 minutes, another free-kick, this time midway within the Blues' half, on Back's left touch-line, cleared the centre, but was reverse-headed from beyond the far post, square in front of goal. However, the ball came in awkwardly and Macdonald had to stretch back to chop it forward from 10 metres and did not trouble "Van Der Sar".

It was end-to end stuff but frenetic and broken, energy-driven rather than controlled, and chances, though frequent for both teams, edgy and unclear. Free-kicks were frequent. "Dokus's" snap shot from 22 metres almost surprised Maciver but slipped a metre outside his right-hand post. In 17 minutes the best Bacach opportunity so far arrived, when Stone had time in the centre, 20 metres, to measure his right-foot attempt but it struck the feet of Macdonald inside the box in front of him and as the ball ran forward, he whacked it first-time but the ball went straight upwards. Five minutes later, yet another Back free-kick, this time by Stone, 20 metres out in the centre, hit the wall, was whipped back in, then led to a mêlée on the Carloway penalty spot, before being booted downfield.

In 29 minutes the chance of the half arrived, when Carloway finally cohered, leading to a glorious Kenny "Beag" breaker straight forward from the centre-line, between Mcleod and Macdonald, to send "Dokus" free to race forward to win the ball, then tap it to the diving keeper's right. However, as he swung early with his left foot to send the ball into the vacant net, he lost his balance and almost fell, and only half-hit the ball, and "Tolsta" managed to catch the trickling ball and clear. Five minutes later another chance went begging, when Allan broke through the centre towards the left bye-line, then somehow managed, under pressure, to whip a waist-high ball across goal, but 10 metres out by the far post, Kenny "Beag" couldn't handle the mid-height of the ball, and knocked it past Maciver's left-hand post.

The final "possible" chance also fell to the young midfielder in 36 minutes when a neat right-foot slip from "Dokus" in the centre circle allowed him to charge forward, but his powerful drive from the edge of the box was high and wide to the right of the Bacach goal.

Half-time: Back 0 Carloway 0

There had been a wealth of strong, committed play - at times, the action had been high-speed, brutal, and all-for-nothing - but the "nice touches", thought, creativity, and neatly constructed moves had been rare. The defences had dominated; both midfielders had struggled to cohere, though individual performances had been notable. Both sides lacked a *mediocentro*; a central organizer, an *animateur*, or both, though Chris Stone, "D.J." later, had tried to fulfil this role. The pace obviated "Sqweg's" candidacy for this role, while Mackay was too far back, or "Dokus" too far forward to slot completely into this job description. Crossley, Miller, and Chris Macleod were sorely missed.

In 49 minutes Back almost broke the deadlock when Stuart Macdonald was sent behind "Tiger" down the left. Midway within the Carloway half, he delivered a high, intelligent diagonal across the face of the goal but the arriving Martin did not read the flight of the ball carefully and it spun away at high speed a couple of metres outside Craigie's left-hand post.

The arrival of Maciver on the hour to inject pace and strike-power up front was eclipsed by an unexpected opener at the other end within five minutes. A Bacach free-kick, just inside the Carloway half, towards Back's right touch-line, came though the assembled multitude in the centre towards the far post. Stone reacted athletically and leapt upwards to click it high into the net with his right-foot from 10 metres (1-0).

The Blues' work-rate, and pressure, switched up a gear or two, but as Back's defences closed ranks, they simply could not find a break in the wall. Indeed, the chances for Back increased as na Gormaich committed forward, with "Windy" biting the bullet and sending on Callum "Beag" for "Tiger". The openings could still not be created. In 71 minutes another Back free-kick, midway within the Blues' half, towards their right, had been hit high, but in 83 minutes the tie was settled. Another break saw a high swinging clearance being controlled by Louis Macdonald on the Bacach left, midway within the Blues' half. He turned sharply to his left and made the bye-line, then cut back across goal for Martin, coming in unmarked towards the right of goal, to side-foot home from 10 metres (2-0).

It was an object lesson for Carloway in how straightforwardly simple it is to create and score a goal. A minute later Kenny "Beag" seized on a breaking ball inside the Back half, on the left, but his strong right-footer, from 30 metres, whipped a couple of feet over Maciver's left-hand bar. In added-on time, Moody, now operating mainly in central midfield, slipped the ball forward and through for "Dokus", coming into the box on the left. As the defender came at him from his left, he neatly side-stepped him to his right, and then slotted a right-footer to Michael Maciver's right, but the keeper read him and got down smartly to his right to smother the ball.

Full-time: Back 2 (0) Carloway 0 (0)

The dearth of real chances created by the Blues tonight suggests that they might still be playing at the moment and still would not have scored. Again, the back-line performed admirably, even though lack of fitness might have

been a worry for returning great, Calum Tom. It was the new permutation in midfield, like Saturday's versus the Rubhachs, which struggled to function as a unit, even in face of the relative inexperience of the opposition, despite efficient, workman-like performances from "Statto", "Barra", and Allan. Tonight demonstrated that willingness and effort are not enough to win sporting contests, though they undoubtedly help. Talent and insight will always turn the key, when the opposition is as willing and industrious as you are. Those on the field tried hard, resisting a gung-ho approach, *a là* Sam Allardyce, when frustration and reverse were taking their toll, but eventually the tik-tak La Liga patterns only retained possession and gained territory, and lacked pace and endeavour on breaks, hence didn't unlock any doors.

Kenny "Beag's" shot from 30 metres in 84 minutes was Carloway's first shot at goal in the second half. The absences of first team personnel is clearly harming the team, but leads into an additional concern about the threadbare nature of the squad, its lack of man-power. with "Taz" now in St. Andrews, Lee Johnson retired, and Josh Harris returned to Ness. Lack of human resources seems to be the club's biggest enemy. Back have been suffering the same problem, as evidenced tonight (Joel Martin, their second goal-scorer: is he even 15?), and have had to rebuild from the base upwards through youth. Perhaps, Carloway will be forced to follow the same route.

Back Man of the Match: Chris Stone.

Carloway Man of the Match: Jake Allan.