

Lewis and Harris League:

Point 3 (1) Carloway 1 (0)

Stewart Munro 23 Kevin "Barra" Macneil 80
Hugh Morrison 46
Elliott Rudall 68

At Garrabost.

Monday, 04.07.16.

Referee: D.J.Maclean (Bragar).

Carloway line judge: Calum "Cobby" Macleod.

Point line judge: Willie Macaulay

CARLOWAY: 4-4-2.

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

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

Ross "Tiny" Maclean

Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Donald "D.I." MacLennan Ali "Laxay" Macdonald

Kevin "Barra" Macneil Eachainn Miller Patrick Vigurs Archie "Statto" MacDonald ■
Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Jake Allan

Subs. used: Joe Armstrong (Patrick Vigurs) 71; Billy Anderson (Cameron "Tiger Macarthur) 74.

Subs. not used: Gordon Craigie; Stuart "Gochan" Macleod; Jake Macleod (Garynahine).

Yellow card: Archie "Statto" MacDonald 43.

POINT: 4-4-2

Manager: Angus "Stoodie" Mackay.

Ally "Wally" Maciver Stewart Munro ■

Alex Macdonald Calum "Cally" Mackay ■ *Angus Macdonald Hugh Morrison*

Stephen Campbell Elliott Rudall (capt.) Scott Campbell Stephen Kettings

Ally Lamont

Subs. used: Andrew Morrison (Calum "Cally" Mackay) 74; Martin Lightbody (Hugh Morrison) 88

Sub. not used: Donald "Spike" Smith.

Yellow cards: Calum "Cally" Mackay 63; Stewart Munro 74

Carloway don't often arrive at Garrabost on the back of an unbeaten 7-match run, although when you think of it, Carloway don't really want to arrive at Garrabost at all. It is a venue of mixed blessings for the Blues. In September, 2012, it hosted the stomach-churning 7-6 shoot-out victory in the gathering gloom over Back, after a 1-1 draw in 90 minutes, which gave the Blues their first trophy, the Coop Cup, in the modern era. However, victories over the Rudhachs themselves at Garrabost have been rare in the last few years. Earlier this season Carloway thought they had done just that in the Jock Stein semi-final, 2-1, only for Elliott Rudall to head the equalizer with three minutes to go, which led on to penalty shoot-out misery. Last season, of course, witnessed the contentious 0-4 League defeat, featuring Elliott Rudall's controversial opener, followed by a hotly-disputed Alastair Gillies' penalty. The 1-6 Moldova Lewis reverse a month later is best forgotten. There was some relief in April, 2014, with a creditable 2-1 ABC triumph, but 0-1 was the final score a month later in the Lewis and Harris.

In June the previous year it took a Domhnall Mackay header in the 97th (!!!) minute

to rescue a point, so we find we must go all the way back to May, 2012, to find League success, 2-0, thanks to strikes from Calum "Caley" Macleod and Scott Macaulay (remember them?) which was followed in August by the 2-1 semi-final win that led to the Back confrontation above. So, not a "*Field of Dreams*", then, more like the Barvas moor - watch carefully where you put your foot.

Tonight, Carloway's recent form, coupled with rumours of Rudhach problems with player availability, suggested a favourable outcome was possible. The starting line-up was unchanged, always a good sign up here, though Billy Anderson, Stuart "Gochan" Macleod, and Jake Macleod joined Gordon Craigie and Joe Armstrong in the bull-pen in place of Dan Crossley (knee and back concerns), Murdo "Squegg" Macleod, and Euan Gilmour. The most noticeable change in the opposition was Rudall stepping back into the absent Alasdair Gillies's shoes.

A constant downpour replaced the usual Garrabost feature - an icy, easterly gale - as the players struggled on a very slippery pitch to avoid the sodden central area. Judging by the early bounce of the ball, it must have been touch-and-go whether or not to deem the ground as playable at all. It took until the 10th minute for the first real chance to present itself, for either side. Carloway had begun adventurously and had established a controlled edge, which eventually led to "Barra" breaking through the middle, then supplying "Dokus" moving wide to be clear on the right. His low, square cross, 14 metres from the bye-line, was scrambled out by Macdonald in the centre, and presented the ball neatly for Patrick Vigurs, on the edge of the box, to the Blues' right. He instantly hit a fiery right-footer but unfortunately it curved outwards across goal and shot a couple of metres past Lamont's right-hand post.

Five minutes later clever interplay between "Dokus" and Vigurs in the centre sent them down na Gormaich's right, from their own half to midway within Point's, before releasing Allan behind Campbell along the right. His high swinging cross, 12 metres from the bye-line, enabled "Statto" to escape his marker in the centre and run in but he somehow contrived to head-glance the ball a foot outside the far post.

It was costly as Point, who had not threatened till then, went ahead unexpectedly in the 23rd minute. Stewart Munro gathered the ball just inside the Carloway half, on the Rudhach left, then cut inwards. As the defence retreated, he let go a speculative right-foot daisy-cutter from 22 metres which just crept low inside "Tiny's" left-hand post (**0-1**).

The Blues almost replied immediately when "Dokus" trickery in the centre circle allowed him to surge forward, then send "Barra" free on the right. Twenty metres from the bye-line, he checked, then sent a lovely, curving waist-high cross across the face of the goal. Unfortunately it was just a metre too far for the inrushing Allan to reach but very nearly sneaked in itself by the far post. In the 31st minute it was Miller's turn to speed down the right, then 24 metres from the line, send in an inviting high diagonal which MacDonald met on the volley in the centre, 14 metres from goal, but the ball disappeared straight into the heavens.

Three minutes later “Dokus” dribbled his way from the centre, diagonally right, then checked midway within the Rudhach half before reprising “Barra’s” effort with a low, left-foot curler across goal, which, likewise, was just that step beyond “Barra” and “Statto”. In 38 minutes a blistering Miller run took him through the centre from his own half, leading to him sending a perfect McIlroy breaker between Kettings and Rudall for “Statto” to run in on goal, but as Lamont advanced, the striker flicked the ball past keeper’s right from the edge of the box but well-wide of his right-hand post.

Punishment almost arrived in the next minute when a nasty “Wally” free-kick from 24 metres, out on the Point left, was whipped inwards over the wall, bounced up awkwardly in front of “Tiny”, and forced him to palm the ball away for a corner to his left.

Half-time: Point 1 Carloway 0

What do you say to a set of players over their half-time oranges who are playing reasonably well as a unit, edging territory and possession, creating plenty of “takeable” chances, but simply can’t score? What words of wisdom can make players sharper in front of goal? Answers on postcards are welcome in na Gormaich's postbag.

The Blues had not really been pressured by the Rudhachs, who lacked their usual aggressive edge, with Rudall in defence and “Spike” on the bench, and had exploited this, especially down the right, to create several goal-worthy chances - but found themselves staring at a 0-1 deficit.

It got immediately worse. A long clearance flew the length of the pitch, towards the Carloway right. “Tiger” tried to usher the ball out for a throw-in but Alex Macdonald caught it, managed to break inwards past the defender, then turned him to the left, before sending a squared, low bullet-like cross, 12 metres from the line, into the centre. Morrison, rushing in behind Mackay and in front of “D.I.”, launched himself flat-out to meet it with his out-stretched foot and ram it home to “Tiny’s” right (**0-2**).

The Blues’ spirits clearly plummeted after this, as they no doubt pondered the motives of an unkind god. Despite continuing to have the greater share of possession and territory, their chances became distinctly rarer, and a desperation to move forward gave greater space to Munro and “Wally” in the Carloway half.

However, the next calamity did not come from them. In 68 minutes the wheels finally came off, as Rudall, after breaking up a Carloway attack midway within his own half, saw the centre of the park open up for him like the Red Sea, permitting him to steam into the Blues’ half, before unleashing a right-foot bloater from 24 metres which seemed to be clearing the bar before suddenly dipping behind “Tiny’s” head and bouncing home off the underside of the centre bar (**0-3**).

The game was now effectively over as a contest and, more and more, resembled a bounce game: the Rudhachs, naturally enough in the circumstances, could sit back

and wait for the Blues to come at them; na Gormaich were compelled to race around, trying to extract any shred of joy they could from what they would certainly consider a grossly unfair evening.

In 72 minutes “Dokus” won the ball in the centre circle, then raced forward into the Point half, before unleashing a low drive from 25 metres which Lamont held safely to his right. Final throws of the dice were Joe Armstrong coming on for a central defensive role, allowing Mackay to move into central midfield in place of Vigurs, and sacrificing “Tiger” to enable Billy Anderson to enter the field to support the captain.

In the 80th minute the strategy bore some fruit. Persistence from “Dokus” on the Point right saw him fight off two bruising tackles to make the corner flag, double-back, then send a high, deep cross which cleared the goal but was reverse-headed beyond the far post by Allan, 12 metres from the bye-line. Lamont came for it, changed his mind and stepped back, only for “Barra”, directly in front of goal, to out-jump Macdonald and head into the empty net **(1-3)**.

Two minutes later Carloway almost reduced the leeway further when characteristic trickery from “Dokus” on the right, midway within the Rudhach half, saw him cut inside Campbell and avoid challenges from Macdonald and Rudall to reach the edge of the box, but just as he hesitated to pick his spot, Macdonald recovered to get his foot in to block what looked like a certain goal.

A minute later Point had a chance themselves to add to their tally when Andrew Morrison gathered the ball on the right corner of the Blues’ box and let loose a swinging right-footer which “Tiny” had to stretch high to tip on to the left junction of his bar and post and past. Deep in added-on time, a through ball from Macdonald sent “Wally” clear into the opposition half behind the line, on the Point left. He carried the ball to the edge of the box but the outrushing “Tiny” contrived brilliantly to block his slip, 12 metres from goal, low to his left.

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

After this, the Carloway dressing room must have found it remarkably easy to empathize with the feelings of the inhabitants of the Westside dressing room the previous Monday at Cnoc a’ Choilich. They would have been asking themselves the same question, over and over: how difficult is it to actually score a goal?

It’s inappropriate to criticize the squad after this débacle as they did everything more or less right for the first 50 minutes. True, the midfield occasionally lost its cohesion, but Stewart Munro and Elliott Rudall could be considered to have struck it lucky with both shots. Only Hugh Morrison’s attempt might be seen as the result of slackness or carelessness, but by the 46th minute it might not really have mattered - the loss of the odd goal, or two - as, by then, it could be argued, Carloway might have had a substantial lead. The following 40 minutes would not then have followed the pattern it did, of course: a gradual loosening of the tactical frame as na Gormaich pushed to

retrieve some moiety of comfort from proceedings, allowing more and more openings to appear at the back for Point. Even then, it was noticeable that the Rudhachs were unable to capitalize, as a lack of sharpness seemed as prevalent among the Rudhach front-runners, as it did among their Carloway counterparts.

Nevertheless, Point scored three times, the Blues once, so, in footballing terms, the Rudhachs "*deserved*" to win. Congratulations. Now na Gormaich must move on and consider the much more onerous task ahead, Iochdar Saints on Saturday, in the Coop Cup, with a depleted squad.

Point Man of the Match: Elliott Rudall.

Carloway Man of the Match: Donald "D.I." MacIennan.