

Lewis and Harris League:

Carloway 1 (0) Back 0 (0)

Domhnall Mackay 81 (pen.)

At Cnoc a' Choilich, Carloway, 19.00.

Monday, 11.7.16.

Ref.: Calium "Chancey" Macleod.

Carloway line judge: Alasdair "Tiger" Macarthur.

CARLOWAY: 4-5-1.

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

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

Ross "Tiny" Maclean

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

*Callum "Beag" Mackay Billy Anderson Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod Ben Smith Kenny
"Dokus" Macdonald ■*

Archie "Statto" MacDonald ■

*Subs. used: Stuart "Gochan" Macleod (Billy Anderson) 36; Euan Gilmour (Murdo "Sqweg"
Macleod) 55; Gordon Craigie (Stuart "Gochan" Macleod) 63.*

Sub. not used: Jake Macleod.

*Yellow cards: Domhnall Mackay 74; Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald 75; Archie "Statto"
MacDonald 76.*

Unfortunately, there is no down time during the Lewis and Harris League season, a few days for quiet reflection after a crushing defeat. A team simply has to follow Jerome Kern's advice to dust itself off and "*start all over again*". Excuses can be made for Saturday's débacle: the conditions were hardly appropriate for a game of football (although they were the same for both sides) and made some spectators wonder why the game was not postponed. Lack of squad availability would have been another acceptable plea for delay, but wasn't exercised.

Apparently, being bawled at in a muddy field in Perthshire was a more attractive proposition for some than a Coop Cup semi-final. So, the Blues opted to take the field with a half-strength side, and were compelled to undergo an excruciating opening 45 minutes. Enough said - good luck in the Final to our old nemesis, Saints, and on to the next problem appearing over the horizon - or on the A858, to be exact.

Tonight, na Gormaich were slotted to face Back, for the fourth time this season. A run-through of the previous three encounters was hardly encouraging. In early May at Cnoc a' Choilich in the Jock Stein, Carloway shot into a 3-0 lead in 29 minutes, then were clawed back to equality three minutes from time, before Jake Allan rescued the tie with a last-minute winner.

Thereafter, the Bacachs' net became extremely difficult to locate. A dismal 0-2 League defeat at Col Uarach followed a week later, then on the following Friday, 13th (!!!), na Gormaich's catalogue of misery continued at Col Uarach with extra-time elimination, 0-1, in the Highland Amateur Cup, Round 1.

Anyway, as the quotation goes, *"The past is another country"*. Hopefully, Carloway would do things differently tonight. However, availability remained a problem, and extensive jiggery-pokery was required to fulfil the fixture. Fortunately, Domhnall Mackay returned to command the back-line, but Patrick Vigurs (injured early on Saturday) and Jake Allan were both no-shows, while Joe Armstrong, Eachainn Miller, and "Windy" himself had still not returned from Perthshire. Dan Crossley flew back to play, but was unwell, and could not figure. So veterans, Billy Anderson and Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod, became an unlikely engine room, with young stars, Callum "Beag" Mackay and Ben Smith, drafted in on either flank, Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald just in front of them, and Archie "Statto" MacDonald sent forward to lead. Apart from Gordon "Van Der Sar" Craigie, the bench had a decidedly junior look, with Stuart "Gochan" Macleod, Euan Gilmour, and Jake Macleod present.

The early evening sun was a slight problem for "Tiny" (honestly!) as the early exchanges led into a period of broken play. In 4 minutes "Laxay" had the first serious attempt on goal, as a characteristic stumbling dribble from his own half led him into the centre, but Michael Maciver watched his low shot from 24 metres pass a metre outside his right-hand post. Four minutes later a speculative Bacach ball from their right broke off "Laxay" to cause a series of corners, leading to confusion in the Blues' box, before being knocked out to the right edge of the Carloway area, where it was met by Macleod but his effort went straight up into the stratosphere.

In 17 minutes, "Tolsta" gathered a loose ball in his midfield, moved into the Carloway half, then flicked a beautiful chip, diagonally rightwards for Chris Macleod to run into the Blues' box unchallenged. However, from 16 metres his low drive across goal evaded "Tiny" expertly but went a couple of metres outside the far post. In 24 metres a "Statto" free-kick, 24 metres from goal on the Carloway left, swirled slightly as it cleared the wall, forcing Maciver to paw it away to his left for a corner.

However, though play was fragmented with cohesive movement generally unforthcoming, and neither side able to enforce a pattern on proceedings, Back were beginning to edge territory and chances, with the Carloway midfield off the pace and unable to operate as a unified force. This in turn led to a spate of Bacach free-kicks around the Blues' box. In 25 minutes Louie Macdonald sent a free-kick from 22 metres carefully over the wall but straight to "Tiny". In 32 minutes a "Gordie" Maciver corner from their left curled dangerously across the Carloway goal, 8 metres out, but M.J. Maclean, unmarked by the far post, completely miscued his header and the ball spun well-wide.

Two minutes later, in an attempt to kick-start the machine, the Blues rang the changes: Billy Anderson, who had been struggling with a back injury, exited, with Smith dropping back, Callum "Beag" going right, and "Gochan" arriving on the left. But still na Gormaich could not gain a foothold and in 42 minutes "Gordie" eluded "Laxay" on the right, cut in, and tried his luck from 20 metres in the centre, but his shot crept a metre wide of "Tiny's" left-hand post. A

minute later a Macleod chip into the Blues' box was headed out by "D.I.", but Joel Martin, on the right edge of the box, could not effectively control his right-foot volley, and it shot off at an angle on to the moor.

In added-on time a long forward pass from Mackay found "Dokus" turning leftwards, midway within the Back half. He made 20 metres but sent a reasonable right-footer a metre over the bar. It was Carloway's best "chance" of the half.

Half-time: Carloway 0 Back 0

The management's options for improvement were limited, of course, though one consolation was that "Bomie's" lot were as clueless near goal as Carloway's. The only real choice for na Gormaich was to ask the experienced performers to change up a gear, move around a lot more, and hope that a spark - any spark - would be created.

The omens were not good. In a replay of the first half, na Gormaich's defence were immediately under pressure, eventually scrambling the ball outwards, for Macdonald, on the edge of the box, to slip the ball neatly to his right, but from 16 metres, Chris Macleod lifted the ball sky-high when he tried to lob the approaching Maclean.

In 52 minutes Carloway created their best effort of the game so far when a battling "Statto" won the ball in the centre, just inside the Back half, then sent a glorious Bobby Murdoch between Jason Macleod and Macdonald for Callum "Beag", now on the left, to run in unhindered on goal. As the defence closed in, the youngster cracked in a left-foot drive which seemed to strike the near junction of post and bar and be helped onwards by Maciver's fist. Four minutes later "Dokus" met a headed clearance 20 metres out, but his left-foot volley whizzed a metre outside Maciver's left-hand post.

The contest was opening up as both sides shape-shifted to find that elusive opener. More changes were forced on the Blues early in the half with "Sqweg" and "Gochan" departing, to be replaced by Gilmour and the oldest man in Carloway. Mackay was now trusted to support and energize central midfield, with the Blues reverting to a back three.

The downside to this move was to allow his counterpart, "Tolsta", to get behind him in 62 minutes but his attempt from 24 metres flew 2 metres outside "Tiny's" right-hand post. Two minutes later yet more trickery from "Dokus" in the centre circle enabled him to move forward to the left, then do a characteristic check 22 metres from goal and turn rightwards, but his right-foot drive slipped a metre outside Maciver's right-hand post. In 67 minutes "Statto" outpaced Macdonald on the left, before sending in a squared, high cross, 16 metres from the line. "D.I." ran to meet the ball by the near post but his header went straight up.

However, just as Carloway appeared to be stepping up the pressure, a double let-off occurred at the other end. Martin and "Tolsta" combined towards the fringe of Blues' box, before the ball was glided left for Chris

Macleod to ghost in from the left. "Tiny" was out like a shot to block Macleod's effort from 16 metres, then block the rebound on to the near post and off for a corner.

Back were to regret these missed opportunities three minutes later when a curious mixture of questionable circumstances gifted na Gormaich the winner. A Carloway attack was repulsed, only to be returned by Mackay, midway within the Bacach half, towards the Back left. Tiger", of all people, gathered the ball and checked inwards across the left edge of the Bacach box. A wrestling match ensued with Macleod as he tried to pass and the Carloway man went down. "*Penalty!*", claimed the Blues. "*Free-kick on the line!*", said the referee. Cue enormous stooshie around this award, but within the general rammy, Captain Mackay stepped forward and stabbed an early free-kick straight towards Maciver. The ball was blocked back out, allegedly by "Tolsta's" hand. "*Penalty this time!*", decided the referee, and also appeared to send "Tolsta" off for deliberate handball. It was the Back players' turn to go astronomical, but Captain Courageous Mackay was unfazed by the general mayhem around him and struck a perfect penalty high to Maciver's left, as the goalkeeper went right (1-0).

Nothing momentous occurred in the final few minutes, excepting the players' tempers to cool back down to white heat, though there was a momentary rush of blood in "Tiny's" head when he mishit a pass leftwards towards Gilmour, but, fortunately, "Laxay" was alive to the threat and got back in time behind him to block the attempted conversion for a corner.

Full-time: Carloway 1 (0) Back 0 (0)

This wasn't the most memorable 90-minute experience enacted at Cnoc a' Choilich. Not for want of player effort, but the unfamiliar line-up, and the constant changes in shape and personnel, militated against any sustained, cohesive movement. Lack of pace was clearly a problem for the central midfield, though, once again, the back-line were solid. They were helped by the fact that most danger, if any, came from the Back midfield - Chris Macleod and "Tolsta" - with the perennially dangerous "Gordie" Maciver quiet - perhaps wasted - on the right, although this was more likely due to exemplary marking from "Laxay". One thing was obvious: when Eachain Miller and Dan Crossley are unavailable, a difficult hole is immediately apparent in midfield, and, gifted as Billy Anderson, "Sgweg" and "Dokus" are, the three of them as a midfield triangle was not successful. But what else could "Gus" do? The alternative was untried and unled youth thrown in at the deep end against the likes of Macleod and "Tolsta" in what was, though uninspiring, a fiercely-contested 90 minutes.

Carloway Man of the Match: Ali "Laxay" Macdonald.
Back Man of the Match: Ali "Tolsta" Maciver.