

Lewis and Harris League:

## **Stornoway Athletic 4 (0) Carloway 5 (3)**

*Nic "Nuck" Davis 53*

*Sean "Bayble" Macleod 58*

*John Woodman 66*

*Ross Allison 67*

*Donald "D.I." MacIennan 11*

*Archie "Statto" MacDonald 40, 45*

*Jake Allan 51*

*Andrew "Tago" Maciver 61*

*At Goathill Park, Stornoway.*

*Monday, 8.8.16, 7 p.m.*

*Referee: Neil Macritchie.*

*Carloway line judge: Andrew Macleod.*

*Athletic line judge: Magnus Johnson.*

*CARLOWAY: 4-4-1-1.*

*Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.*

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

*Ross "Tiny" Maclean*

*Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Donald "D.I." MacIennan Ali "Laxay" Macdonald Joe Armstrong*

*Andrew "Tago" Maciver Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Patrick Vigurs Archie "Statto" MacDonald*

*Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald*

*Jake Allan*

*Subs. used: Callum "Beag" Mackay (Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald) 45; Eachainn Miller (Ali "Laxay" Macdonald) 51; Dan Crossley (Andrew "Tago" Maciver) 67.*

*Subs. not used: Gordon Craigie; Stuart "Gochan" Macleod.*

*Yellow cards: Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur 33; Callum "Beag" Mackay 46; Jake Allan 58; Patrick Vigurs 66.*

Three weeks had elapsed since Carloway's normal club side had last competed as a team (the 4-3 victory over Westside at Cnoc a' Choilich in Round 1 of the Moldova Lewis), due to the two EaF semi-final ties and the aborted League fixture, all versus Ness. Therefore this run-out against old adversaries, Athletic, was entirely welcome with the EaF Final approaching on Friday at Creagan Dubh, even more so as suspensions ("D.I.'s" for instance) had been served, and minor injuries had healed or had been given time to improve, e.g. Patrick Vigurs and Dan Crossley. Jake Allan was also available once more. Therefore, apart from Billy Anderson's absence on honeymoon, the management were delighted to have a full squad to choose from.

"Windy" decided to persist with Allan up front, supported by "Dokus", with Vigurs joining Domhnall Mackay to form an imposing midfield, alongside former stalwart, Andrew "Tago" Maciver, back on the island for a short period. With Friday's Final in mind, this meant Crossley could be spared a full 90 minutes and kept on the bench as support if necessary, together with July Player of the Month, Eachainn Miller, whose welfare was also a concern, considering that he also had a key Junior fixture to play next evening. With Callum "Beag" Mackay and newly-available Stuart "Gochan" Macleod also in the bull-pen beside the perennial Gordon Craigie, the line-up was substantial.

Oddly, enough the sides had only confronted each other once this season, in the reverse League game at Cnoc a' Choilich on 6th June, when na Gormaich were in the midst of their great 7-match winning streak. Then the Blues had dominated, thrashing in six, against Aths' three, with Crossley and "Statto" each registering a

pair, and “Dokus” and “D.I.” also contributing to the score sheet. With Athletic having a poor season by their standards, languishing two places below and ten points behind Carloway in the League, and only three League victories to their name, the omens looked auspicious for the Blues, but even Nostradamus wouldn’t have been confident predicting na Gormaich’s results.

A brittle evening sun, shining cross-wise across Goathill, discomfited the eyes of both sets of players initially but the absence of wind did suffice to allow the sides to keep the ball low and controlled to build from the back. Carloway immediately used the combined power of Mackay and “Tago” to dominate central midfield and negate any early threat from the creative Davis, though the unpredictable elusiveness of Calum Masson proved to be difficult to contain throughout. This ploy forced Athletic on to the back foot and to utilize the long ball, but with “Tiger”, “D.I.”, “Laxay”, and Armstrong on the button from the whistle, this tactic had little success as Khalil, etc. were compelled to chase fruitlessly.

In 6 minutes a long ball from “D.I.” in the centre circle allowed Allan to break left of “Koch” to the bye-line, check back, then send a zinging right-footer crashing against the top of Craig Macleod’s post, before rebounding awkwardly back to the hitman. However, the ball was spinning wildly and his second attempt jack-knived across the pitch. Nevertheless the opener soon arrived, five minutes later. A Blues’ free-kick on their left, 10 metres inside the Hoops’ half and 5 metres in from the touch-line, was lifted into the box expertly by “Dokus”, but headed strongly away for a corner on the near-side. “Statto’s” perfect corner came in head-high for “D.I.” to out-jump everyone, 12 metres out by the near post, and send a header whizzing across goal and just under the far junction of bar and post. The defending full-back got his head to it but could only head it straight up into the net behind the bar **(0-1)**.

With Macritchie and Davis still struggling to create momentum and liberate their forwards, na Gormaich continued to play neatly from the back and spread the back-line, especially on the right where “Tiger” increasingly managed to overlap. However, it took till the 28th minute to forge the next real chance, when another MacDonald corner was met by Allan by the near post, 12 metres from goal, but this time the full-back by the near post managed to head it off the line and away for a second corner.

The delayed arrival of “Wee John” on the park as substitute in the 38th minute undoubtedly added to the weight and drive of the Stornoway men coming through midfield, and led to two dangerous Macritchie free-kicks midway within the Carloway half. However, the perfectly lofted strikes went unmet as they flew straight through to “Tiny” on his centre goal-line.

Two minutes later, the game started to run away from Athletic as “Dokus” came back to win the ball on the right of the centre-line, then squared into “Pongo” in the centre-circle. The midfielder’s early through ball was seized by “Statto” crossing rightwards in front of “Koch” on the centre edge of the box. He then forced his way inwards to flight the ball ever so neatly over the despairing right hand of Macleod and home from 16 metres **(0-2)**.

Finally, Athletic broke on the right and no.12 made 20 metres from the bye-line, before unexpectedly cutting in, and cracking a left-footer which was deflected for a

corner. The corner came in high and was headed goalwards strongly from the centre spot. The ball whacked down and upwards, forcing "Tiny" to scramble quickly to paw the ball away by his left-hand post. However, the Hoops' misery deepened even further moments later when Carloway broke immediately down the right and a long through ball from "Dokus" on the right centre line was misread by Aths' central defence and MacDonald ghosted in once more from the left to escape his marker through the middle and slip a neat, low left-footer past the helpless keeper's right from 16 metres (**0-3**).

### **Half-time: Stornoway Athletic 0 Carloway 3**

At this stage all the problems seemed to rest with the Stornoway side, although coherence and added drive had gradually become apparent towards the end of the half with a strengthened midfield of Masson, "Nuck", and "Wee John". Yet Carloway had generally controlled the play and the defence had been largely untroubled, so, from their point of view, it seemed to be a case of, "*Steady as you go*". However, as the whistle blew, the first surprise was Callum "Beag" appearing on the right in place of "Dokus", no doubt to save the latter for the Lochs game.

Straightaway Athletic broke, Masson driving deep down the Carloway right, before checking 10 metres in from the touch-line. Twenty metres from the bye-line he unleashed a right-foot rocket, which "Tiny" held high in the centre of his goal as it dipped menacingly. After another Macritchie free-kick, 20 metres from goal on the left of the Carloway area, struck the wall at pace and spun away harmlessly, the Blues capitalized on Aths's commitment forward, with a swift break through the centre, Domhnall Mackay sending an early ball forwards towards the rightwards-breaking "Statto". Macleod was out like a shot to block as the striker avoided "Koch" to shoot, but the arriving Allan blasted home from 10 metres (**0-4**).

The Blues clearly were thinking the job might be done as Eachainn Miller immediately replaced the centre-piece of the defence, "Laxay", who appeared to have been slightly injured earlier. Before na Gormaich could realign the defence, however, Athletic pulled one back. A long, low ball through the centre was seized on by a striker beating the outrushing "Tiny" to the ball, 16 metres from goal. He carried the ball to his left. then checked back a metre from the bye-line to lob a right-footer high over the returning keeper from 16 metres. The ball struck the far post high up, before rebounding straight out to "Nuck" on the edge of the box. The midfielder then took a moment to steady himself before firing a careful right-foot drive high to "Tiny's" left (**1-4**).

The Carloway new back-line, with Mackay dropping back to replace "Laxay", had still not established their ground rules when the Stornoway men struck again. Another break down the left, behind "Tiger" and wide of Mackay, saw a high diagonal, 25 metres from the bye-line, carry over to the Athletic right, before being crossed back in to the centre. Sean "Bayble" got to the ball first around the penalty spot but his drive was blocked. The rebound spun high in the air and forward, only for the defence to remain static and allow him to take two paces forward unchecked, then drive the ball low and hard to "Tiny's" left (**2-4**).

The Blues' shape seemed to have gone with "Laxay's" departure but "Statto",

fortunately, continued to be hot in front of goal, receiving a through ball on the edge of the box as he came in from the left. He then dragged the ball rightwards into the box past two defenders before flicking it back square to the arriving "Pongo" to fire home from 10 metres (2-5).

Nevertheless, Carloway's back-line was still floundering five minutes later when no. 12 was played though yet again on the left, and midway within the Carloway half, on the touch-line, he sent a glorious left-footer behind Mackay and in front of Armstrong for Woodman to burst into the Blues' box and convert beautifully with a right-foot first touch, high to "Tiny's" left (3-5).

A minute later the turnaround gained greater momentum when Ross Allison, lying wide of Armstrong, 20 metres from the bye-line, cut in square and from the corner of the box sent a speculative left-footer low to "Tiny's" left. The keeper got a hand to it but it crept in low into the corner (4-5).

Desperate times require desperate measures. Pace replaced power with the arrival of Crossley for "Pongo", as na Gormaich tried to re-establish some form of coherence to their line-up, but the game continued to swing back and forth in a manner that would have been unthinkable in the first 50 minutes.

In 75 minutes a Callum "Beag" break on the right saw him leave "Flapjack" down the right touch-line, before cutting the ball square inwards, 20 metres from the byeline. Miller cracked it hard and low first-time from the near corner of the box, but Macleod got down superbly to his left to push the ball round the post. It was na Gormaich's last realistic chance as they finally managed to establish a new equilibrium to their game and lower the pace of proceedings.

Half-chances did not desert the Hoops, however, and the game concluded with a series of hopeful free-kick opportunities in relatively dangerous locations. In 84 minutes a free-kick on the Athletic left, 22 metres from goal, sailed a couple of metres over the bar, before two chances in added-on time proved more threatening. First, another free-kick on the Athletic left ricocheted out off the wall, but a quick stab at the rebound from the centre edge of the box by "Bayble" went a metre outside "Tiny's" left-hand post. Right at the death, a Ross Allison free-kick, 10 metres inside the Carloway half on their left touch-line, was met 16 metres out by the far post, and headed downwards strongly but bounced a metre outside Carloway's right-hand post.

**Full-time: Stornoway Athletic 4 (0) Carloway 5 (3)**

It was an extremely curious final forty minutes tonight, difficult to sum up, but it still provided important lessons for the Blues, and perhaps for all sides. The first, of course, is "*Don't count your chickens ....*", although na Gormaich might be forgiven for believing the game was more or less settled at 4-0 up after 51 minutes, and generally exercising control in midfield and defence, "Statto" uncontrollable up front, etc.

Another obvious requirement is to ensure everyone on the field knows what is now required from them when making a substitution. Things clearly fell apart when "Laxay" departed. It was obvious Mackay was to replace him beside "D.I.", with

Miller slotting in in midfield. However, the captain seemed to seek to combine his new role with his existing one in central midfield and lay slightly too far forward of the line, so that "D.I." was rendered unsure on where to lie - square or behind. Also, "Tiger" continued to try to overlap, leaving room for the fast counter-attacking Masson, and others, to discover oceans of space suddenly on the Carloway right. Hence, the line was dragged right, pulling Joe Armstrong inwards with it, out of position and also unsupported on the left.

Thankfully, the problem was mainly solved in the final quarter-hour. Ignoring those 40 minutes of the game - if that is really possible or desirable - the first 50 minutes provided just under an hour of pleasant viewing for Blues' diehards as, once one goal was chalked up, it looked like a cricket score was achievable. The back-line was solid, and slick passing movements through the midfield allowed Allan and MacDonald to pose repeated problems for the Athletic defence. There were no obvious weaknesses: movement was constant and passing sequences and chance creation exciting - for 51 minutes!!!

**Stornoway Athletic Man of the Match: Calum Masson.**

**Carloway Man of the Match: Archie "Statto" MacDonald.**