

Lewis and Harris League:

Stornoway United 2 (0) Carloway 1 (0)

Lewis "Preston" Robinson (pen.) 76
Hamish Macdonald 85

Ali "Laxay" Macdonald 56

At Goathill Park, Stornoway.

Friday, 26.8.16, 6.30 p.m.

Referee: Andrew Macaulay.

Carloway line judge: Andrew Macleod.

United line judge: James Gunn.

CARLOWAY: 4-4-1-1.

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

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

Gordon Craigie

Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Donald "D.I." MacIennan(capt.) ■ Ali "Laxay" Macdonald Ben Smith
Patrick Vigurs ■ Andrew "Tago" Maciver Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod Archie "Statto" MacDonald
Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald
Jake Allan

Subs. used: Donald "Rab" Maciver (Patrick Vigurs) 34; Euan Gilmour (Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod) 85.

Subs. not used: Owen "Tiger" Macarthur; Gavin "Chinny" Macleod.

Red card: Donald "D.I." MacIennan (violent play) 69.

Yellow card: Patrick Vigurs (inappropriate comments) 34.

Near the end of the "Odyssey", Ulysses says to his men, *"We have still not reached the end of our trials. One more labour lies in store - boundless, laden with danger, great and long, and I must brave it out from start to finish"*. He was clearly a closet Carloway fan, as it very aptly described the Blues' current situation. Tonight's, and Monday evening's, League games seemed almost irrelevant afterthoughts as Carloway looked forward to a possible treble, by winning the Moldova Lewis Cup next Saturday night at tonight's venue.

Regardless of tonight's result, neither side's League position could be altered, so what was at stake was prestige, a marginal improvement in League statistics, a settling of personal pecking-orders, and an opportunity for managers to test new players, formations, etc. Also, opportunities presented themselves for individual players to impress the management. The two sides had only met twice this season, a workman-like, efficient performance giving na Gormaich a straightforward 4-0 victory in the ABC Cup on the opening day of the season at Cnoc a' Choilich. Two goals in the opening nine minutes that night sped the Blues on their way to a semi-final versus Ness and eventual Cup glory. In mid-June Carloway réprised this performance, with "Raymondo", "Statto", and Eachainn Miller delivering an unremarkable 3-0 League success.

Tonight, however, na Gormaich were particularly hard-hit regarding player availability, with the Western Thistle League win last Tuesday at Col Uarach, among other things, causing most of the young players, apart from Owen "Tiger" Macarthur and Euan Gilmour, to be unavailable or rested. So no show for Ross "Tiny" Maclean, Calum "Beag" Mackay, or Eachainn Miller, while a wedding in Breasclate, family bereavement, etc. ruled out Domhnall Mackay, Joe Armstrong, and Stuart "Gochan" Macleod. Dan Crossley was also saved for what were thought to be more important

duties next week. "Windy's" room for manoeuvre, then, was severely constrained, and he was forced to bite the bullet and risk wingman Ben Smith in an unfamiliar role at left-back, then string out a Dad's Army across the midfield, with veteran *animateur*, Murdo "Sgweg" Macleod, making a welcome appearance between the combative Patrick Vigurs, Andrew "Tago" Maciver, and Archie "Statto" MacDonald.

For a change, Goathill did not resemble an Irish sphagnum moor but appeared remarkably firm and inviting as Carloway had the misfortune to open affairs into the setting sun in what developed into a keenly fought, if broken, opening 45 minutes. In 5 minutes, "Sqweg" revealed early why he has always been a major asset to the Blues, and island football, by receiving the ball in the centre circle, looking up, and sending an instant Frank de Boer over the United left-back for "Dokus" to whizz towards the bye-line. Twelve yards out, he whipped across a vicious squared ball, just out of Jack Maclennan's reach, but unfortunately arriving a metre too soon for the charging Allan.

Carloway's makeshift line-up certainly were attempting to gel as quickly as possible and apply a pressured build-up which kept United on the back foot early, but lack of pace in midfield allowed the youthful, nippy Wasps to break at speed through it and confront the back-line. In 10 minutes such a break led to a cross from no.8 Sven on the United left, midway within the Carloway half, taking a nasty deflection which carried it well-wide of the far post. In an attempt to prevent the corner, an attempted hooked clearance led to a gigantic Garry Owen going straight up, then descending at lightning speed under the Carloway bar. Craigie, however, managed to fight off a posse of challengers to punch up and away. Four minutes later a blistering run from midway within his own half, saw United's James Macaulay zoom towards "Van Der Sar". Twenty metres from goal a clever wall-pass sent him rightwards into the box, yet, under pressure, he still managed to slip it back and leftwards to the arriving no. 3, but his cracking drive from 12 metres was blocked brilliantly by Craigie and cleared.

A minute later a "Sqweg" through ball from the centre circle sent "Dokus" behind the line and into the box. Maclennan was out like a flash but "Dokus" succeeded in flicking it over the keeper, despite him getting a hand to the ball. and then flicking it onwards towards the unguarded goal from 12 metres. Amazingly, a Wasps' defender somehow got back to boot it away, a metre from crossing the line. Nevertheless, strangely enough, for all Carloway largely controlled a majority of territory and possession, the chances kept coming for United - swift on the break, and direct in approach. In 21 minutes another break down their right saw the wingman wriggle behind Smith to make 12 metres from the bye-line. His sharp, low cross came straight to Sven, ghosting in front of "Laxay", but his first-time side-foot by the near post shot a metre wide. Two minutes later it was Sven again who sent a deep, high cross from the United left, midway within the Carloway half, on the touchline. It carried towards the far bye-line where a reverse header forced Craigie to come out to thwart an attempted connect 10 metres in front of goal and punch onwards for a corner to his right.

The Blues replied just after the half-hour when a "Dokus" corner on the Blues' right

led to an almighty melée in the United box, forcing MacIennan to block MacDonald's attempt from 12 metres, the ball spinning off like a pinball around the area. Eventually, the loose ball arrived at Allan, 16 metres out, but his shot was blocked on the line, and eventually cleared.

Half-time: Stornoway United 0 Carloway 0

For a rapidly patched-together side Carloway had performed reasonably coherently, though had only threatened sporadically. Indeed, the industry and effort from the young United side had looked much more likely to create an opening, but the rock-hard commitment of "D.I." and "Laxay" had kept them at bay, and this, together with a lack of coolness in front of goal, had kept the score-sheet empty. Once again, Carloway opened, trying to force things. In 55 minutes a Smith tackle and break forward on the left saw him pick out "Dokus" perfectly in the centre, 20 metres from goal. Expert control allowed "Dokus", moving leftwards, to fox his marker with a sharp reverse, then perform a second reverse, which enabled him to send in a crisp low shot at goal, but MacIennan read it clearly and dropped on the daisy-cutter.

A minute later "Laxay" robbed a breaking striker on the edge of his box before moving into the United half. He slipped the ball right to "Sqweg", who once again picked out "Dokus" perfectly, moving down the right touch-line. He reached the bye-line before cutting across a low ball into the box which the stretching MacIennan could only beat outwards. "Laxay", who had continued his run, met it first-time on the edge of the area and smacked it firmly through a ruck of players and home (**0-1**).

Immediately, Carloway survived a scare as Kevin Flower was sent clear down the Wasps' right to make the edge of the Carloway box, but as he attempted to check inwards, an incisive "Laxay" tackle robbed him. The ball was played swiftly forward "Sqweg" in the centre circle, and he in turn sent the early breaker over the retreating back-line for Allan to charge into the box. A blocking tackle caused the ball to spin loose, and yet another furious melée ensued in the United box, but without a result.

As the game started to drift towards an inconclusive ending, a turning point dropped on proceedings in the 69th minute, with the dismissal of "D.I.", captain for the night, for a hefty tackle on no. 6. Certainly, a booking, but a straight red? Make up your own mind. The referee was in no doubt.

It was a decisive blow to the Blues, the loss of one of the mainstays of their defence, and from then on, strangely enough for a team in the lead, it was an exercise in damage limitation. In 72 minutes no. 6, breaking from the centre circle, sent a speculative drive from 24 metres just over the right of Craigie's bar. Then, a minute later, Flower was sent clear down the right to make the bye-line. He cut a low diagonal across, the ball being driven goal-wards 16 metres out in the centre, but Craigie managed to block the awkward ball outwards. The rebound was banged in immediately but "Tiger" somehow managed to knock it away off the line.

However, in 76 minutes, an overworked defence were slow to clear a low cross from Flower on the right, the ball breaking loose across goal. As United striker "Preston"

pounced on it, a lunging “Tiger” tackle brought him crashing down just inside the centre of the box. “Preston” picked himself up and placed the resultant award low to Craigie’s right (1-1).

Two minutes later it was Hamish Macdonald’s turn to be sent free behind the line, this time on the left. He reached the box, checked back a step, then sent a careful right-foot lob-shot around and over “Van Der Sar” but it carried a metre wide and high of the far side of the bar.

In 80 minutes the Blues had their final realistic chance of the game, when a “Dokus” free-kick, 24 metres from goal, in the centre, was placed neatly over the wall, but Maclennan had no difficulty snatching it. Then, just as na Gormaich started to believe they might reach the finishing line without further damage, the wheels came off. Again, in 85 minutes, Flower broke free on the right and delivered a low diagonal into the box. The connecting drive on the edge of the box was read by the advancing Craigie but took a nasty deflection of “Laxay”s” ankle to the keeper’s right, and the grasping keeper could only help it onwards and rightwards to the unmarked Macdonald, who had the easiest of tasks to slide it home from 8 metres (2-1).

Full-time: Stornoway United 2 (0) Carloway 1 (0)

The importance attached to this fixture by the paying public was plainly demonstrated by the empty terracing, the game having the same atmosphere as a closed-door trial. Not that appeared to inhibit the players, with 4 yellow cards and one red card reflecting their desire to impress - in every sense of the word. It’s difficult to sum up - or criticize - Carloway’s performance tonight, both because it was such an unfamiliar line-up and the players did struggle hard to make it work - and they did to a certain extent, though lack of pace was its major failing; and also because of the continuing lack of an out-and-out striker. “Dokus” preferred his usual Hidegkuti role, lying deep, setting-up or moving wide or forward to supply or strike; Jake Allan has the tendency to drift right, towards what looks like his preferred position on the right. Added to this was a rather muted display from the normally ebullient “Statto” and despite occasional bursts of good moves coming through the centre and trademark golden diagonals or breakers from “Sqweg”, there was no Frazmac lookalike to finish.

The pluses were the continuing vice-like grip of the “D.I.”/“Laxay” central partnership and the general appetite for the ball displayed by those who did turn out tonight, crucial assets in what will be two very trying occasions next week. Monday’s game may not be that important to Carloway - except in so far as they don’t want to lose heavily to the same team they meet later in the week in the Cup Final, and it is the old enemy, Lochs, after all - but it is of huge importance to the men from Leurbost who know that they should win handsomely to keep Point in their sights. Fortunately, “D.I.” will be available for both games next week, despite his red card, and with no apparent injuries picked up tonight, fingers crossed that “Windy” has a full squad to select from on Monday and Saturday.

Stornoway United Man of the Match: Jack MacIennan.
Carloway Man of the Match: Ali "Laxay" MacDonald.