

Lewis and Harris League:

Carloway 3 (2)

*Andrew "Tago" Maciver 1 min.4 secs., 45+2
Domhnall Mackay 50*

Back 2 (1)

*Stuart Macdonald 19 (pen.)
Lewis Macdonald 90*

At Cnoc a Choilich, Carloway,19.00.

Monday, 8.5.17.

Ref.: Neil Macritchie.

Carloway line judge: Calum "Cobby" Macleod.

Back Line Judge: Donald "Dano" Macdonald.

CARLOWAY: 4-5-1.

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

Asst. Managers: "Gus" Maciver, Domhnall Mackay.

Gordon "Van Der Sar" Craigie

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

*Jordan Macleod ■ Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Billy Anderson Archie "Statto" MacDonald
Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald*

Andrew "Tago" Maciver

*Subs. used: Sven Wiltshire (Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald) 36; Fraser Macleod (Billy Anderson)
68; Stuart "Gochan" Macleod (Joe Armstrong) ■ 83.*

Subs. not used: Andrew "Lanky" Macdonald; Matthew Murray.

Yellow card: Jordan Macleod 18.

Red card: Stuart "Gochan" Macleod 83.

Tonight the revolving door of island football brought Carloway's opponents from Day One of the 2017 season out to Cnoc a' Choilich, hopefully not for a repeat of the borefest they served up at Col Uarach in April. That night two rusty, improvised outfits had struggled for 102 minutes to establish cohesive structures and potentially winning tactics for the season ahead, with varying success, but the dearth of goalmouth action and opportunities meant the ABC tie had to be decided, predictably, by a penalty shoot-out.

Performances from both sides have only slightly improved since that forgettable evening, the worst of which has been the Bacachs 1-7 thrashing from Point. Carloway, for their part, have endured three dispiriting defeats at the feet of their greatest rivals, Westside (1-3; 0-6; 0-3), though a glimmer of future promise did unexpectedly appear last Wednesday at Creagan Dubh, with a rather fortuitous 3-2 victory over a much-weakened Champions' side, Lochs. A true test of real progress will, of course, come next Friday when the Blues face a Champions side with more of their usual squad available in the HAC Round 1 at this venue. With a probable away tie against regular HAC winners, Avoch, in the next round, there is plenty to play for.

A couple of enforced changes were necessary tonight with the unavailability of young stars, Callum "Beag" Mackay up front, and Ben Smith in defence/midfield, but, despite the return of Fraser "Frazmac" Macleod, it was decided not to risk him from the whistle, and he joined the bench, beside Sven Wiltshire, Stuart "Gochan" Macleod, Andrew "Lanky" Macdonald, and Matthew Murray. However, the management did select boldly, switching to 4-

5-1, with Andrew "Tago" Maciver delegated to spearhead the attack and midfield *animateur*, Billy Anderson, slotting into central midfield, in the hope that he would contribute that vital spark, much missed with the absence of Dan Crossley and Eachainn Miller.

Again, it was difficult to predict the quality of the opposition because of so many unknown, youthful faces, but the core looked strong, with perennial pain-in-the-neck, Gordon "Gordie" Macliver, lurking at right midfield, to the right of ex-Lochs' star, Chris Mackay, and former Blues' star, Ali "Tolsta" Maciver, appearing as holding midfielder. Fortunately for na Gormaich, there was no sign of another Grade One pest, Chris Macleod, who scored a double in this fixture in July 2015, and stalwart defender, Jason Macleod, only made the bench.

What was the year of the explosive openings to Carloway games? 2011? 2012? It's difficult to remember. "Stats" will know, or Malcom Macdonald. 2011 was definitely the year of Dan Crossley's 35-second opener against Westside at Barvas. So, perhaps a 64 second-strike is not all that much to boast about. Nevertheless, it was very welcome as that was how long it took for "Tago" to see his name go up on the scoreboard. The visitors kicked off, lost the ball just inside the centre of the Carloway half, then saw it transferred down the left, where Billy Anderson managed to control it down beside the corner flag. He turned in and outwards and picked out "Tago" at the near corner of the box. Under pressure, "Tago" performed his characteristic quick, anti-clockwise turn and fired a low, crisp drive deep inside Murdo Maciver's right-hand post **(1-0)**.

The simplicity of the move and strike belied the laborious efforts which were to follow as the Blues tried to equal this feat. Despite the setting sun in their eyes, the Blues used the ice-cold northerly to push forward relentlessly against the wobbling Bacachs, clearly unbalanced by the surprise opening. In 6 minutes a "Dokus" free-kick in the centre circle, just inside the Back half, lofted a high right-footer towards the Back goal. The massed ranks all failed to connect and if the unsighted Macliver had not dived to his right at the last minute and clawed it upwards and away to his right, it would have crept home. As it was, the corner bounced around the penalty spot, causing an almighty melée, with two shots blocked, before it was booted far away.

Three minutes later, the men from Coll had another incredible escape. "Tago" received the ball on the left, made the touch-line, then checked to send a low left-footer high across goal. The wind caught the ball as it passed over Maciver and dropped it downward and inward behind him. Somehow the goalkeeper managed to spin round and touch the ball against the inside of his left-hand post, from where it dropped back inside the 6-metre box. An attempted drive was then blocked on the line, and knocked away for a corner on the Back left.

In 17 minutes, a "Dokus" corner on the Back right caused yet another pinball affair within the Back box, with two attempts charged down, before the ball was kicked desperately away. The question at that point seemed to be, "How

long before a second for Carloway?, but football is a peculiar game, and an over-committed Carloway soon rued these misses.

In 19 minutes a “Laxay” clearance on the Carloway left-touch-line, 10 metres inside his own half, rebounded straight back off an opponent behind him and the Back winger whizzed on to it and flew towards the Carloway box. “Laxay” tracked him at pace, but was always a metre behind, and just as they entered Craigie’s left-hand box, the defender made an inappropriate lunge which brought the winger down. From the spot, Craigie chose right; Stuart MacDonald left (**1-1**).

The Blues tried to respond immediately, with another Anderson diagonal sending “Tago” down the right. In line with the box, he cut in and fired a low right-footer goal-wards but it zoomed well-wide of the Bacach right-hand post.

In 28 minutes the Blues’ high, pressing strategy was nearly punished again when a break on the Back right led to a low cross, square, 20 metres from the line, which tempted Craigie into rushing out by his far post to catch. However, as he fell, the ball slithered outwards from his grasp, allowing Stuart MacDonald, 16 metres from goal, to hit a snap right-foot drive at the unguarded Carloway goal, but it hit “Laxay’s” head on the 6-metre line and flew over the bar.

Four minutes later “Dokus” in the centre found Mackay moving down left. Sixteen metres from the line and just outside the Back box, he lofted a right-foot diagonal across goal which Craig Macleod misheaded backwards and inwards and forced Maciver to scramble desperately across his goal to paw away for a corner to his left. Two minutes later the keeper had to be alert again as a “Dokus” shot from the left, 12 metres back from the bye-line and 20 metres from goal, caused him to push well over his bar.

Two quick free-kicks around 40 minutes, with from the same position, 22 metres from goal in the centre, further tested the keeper. First, MacDonald forced Maciver to parry, then hold, low to his left. Then the keeper managed to push an Anderson attempt off to the right for a corner. The resultant Anderson corner again forced the keeper to punch, high and clear, by the near post.

Just as Back thought they had made it to the break unscathed, a “Tago” super-strike confounded them. First, MacDonald tried to force his way through the centre but was crowded out. As the loose ball broke back, 22 metres from goal, “Tago” came through like an express train and his first-time right-foot rocket took a slight deflection before whamming high into Maciver’s right-hand net, despite the keeper getting a touch to it (**2-1**).

Half-time: Carloway 2 Back 1

If 2011 or 12 was the year of the explosive openings, which season was it that the Blues’ squad seemed to be operating according to *“Zen and the Art of Seeing How Nearly You Can Miss”*? The opening half-hour tonight could certainly rival it. Full credit to Michael Maciver and some unbelievable

reaction saves that kept his team alive, but by the half-hour the net behind him should have been in tatters, and Neil Macritchie should have intervened and signalled, "*No contest*". However, there was still all to play for.

Immediately, Carloway took up where they had left off. In 48 minutes Anderson again made the right corner flag before cutting the diagonally back across goal. "Tago" was on it, 16 metres out to the right of the box, but his low drive thudded into the near-side net. Two minutes later it finally seemed to be all over. A Jordan Macleod corner on the Carloway right came across high and deep. It cleared the centre but "Tago" by the far post, 12 metres from goal, d played the ball square and Mackay rammed it home in the centre (**3-1**).

After this, the tempo markedly dropped as the Blues relaxed but with their midfield and back-line holding well, danger did not immediately threaten and goalmouth incident became markedly rarer. In 55 minutes a "Laxay" run down the right touch-line ended with him transferring the ball inward to Anderson on the centre line and he immediately sent an immaculate Charlie Gallagher forward for "Tago" to outstrip the defence in the centre but his right-footer from 20 metres went straight up.

Back replied from a free-kick, midway within the Carloway half, by the left-touch-line but "Gordie" Maciver's high delivery saw a connecting header blocked, 16 metres from goal in the centre. In 64 minutes a James "Bomie" Macarthur throw-in for Back on their right, 10 metres from the bye-line, came square to "Gordie", and he whipped round on the edge of the box, and swept in a left-footer daisy-cutter, but he pulled it into the near side-netting.

Na Gormaich were idling now, content to pass the ball around and make their opponents work for possession, to come at them, then reply. The trouble with this approach is that once a team loses its momentum, or discards it, it is difficult to regenerate if the other side makes a sudden breakthrough.

As the match was drawing to what appeared an uneventful conclusion, full back Joe Armstrong was injured in a challenge and could not continue. There followed a bizarre dismissal for his replacement Stuart "Gochan" Macleod, who had not informed the official of his appearance on the park and was promptly cautioned.

Fortunately for the Blues, the Bacachs were unable to create openings, despite now having more of the ball and forcing the play - until the final minute, that is.

A corner on the Back left came across high and diagonal to the far corner of the Carloway box. It was knocked back in towards goal, blocked, then fired in again. It was helped on, then, within the 6-metre box, directly in front of goal, Lewis Macdonald flicked high unchallenged into the Blues' net (**3-2**).

Deep in added-on time, Carloway almost paid dearly for their dilatory second-half performance, when a "Gordie" free-kick, 22 metres out in the centre, seemed to be going well-over, then suddenly dipped towards "Van Der Sar's"

left-hand junction of bar and post, but passed a couple of feet outside.

Full-time: Carloway 3 (2) Back 2 (1)

For an hour the Carloway machine operated reasonably efficiently, the defence untroubled (except for a couple of glitches); the midfield solid, and the “Togo” vanguard forceful, mainly due to the early delivery of quality balls from Anderson and the aggressive running of Macleod, Mackay, and MacDonald. In this they were assisted hugely by a wayward opposition structure, which despite the best efforts of “Tolsta”, Mackay, and Macdonald and first-rate goalkeeping by Maciver, seemed to have no clear game-plan. Mind you, conceding a goal in the opening minute damages even the most fool-proof set of tactics.

The third goal damaged this momentum and na Gormaich’s approach had already slipped into idle mode, before “Frazmac” replaced Anderson, in the hope that a clinching fourth goal might kill off the resurgent Bacachs. Unfortunately, the ace striker replaced the player who was most likely to be his source of supply to deliver the decisive strike. With Anderson’s departure, “Frazmac” was once again placed in the Ben Gunn position up front, starved of supply, so that by the 80th minute he was back playing along the centre line, trying to discover the exact location of the ball.

Carloway Man of the Match: Billy Anderson.

Back Man of the Match: Michael Maciver.