

Lewis and Harris League:

## **Carloway 3 (2) Stornoway Athletic 3 (1)**

*Andrew "Tago" Maciver 28, 90 Donald "D.I." MacIennan (o.g.) 11*

*Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald 32 Andrew Morrison 54*

*John MacIsaac 69*

*At Cnoc a' Choilich, Carloway.*

*Monday, 29.5.17, 7 p.m.*

*Referee: Kenneth "Bugsy" Smith.*

*Carloway line judge: Angus Donald "Dee" Macarthur.*

*Athletic line judge: Magnus Johnson.*

**CARLOWAY: 4-5-1.**

*Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.*

*Asst. Managers: Domhnall Mackay; Iain Angus "Gus" Maciver.*

*Gordon "Van Der Sar" Craigie*

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

*Kevin "Gochan" Macleod Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Billy Anderson Eachainn Miller Kenny*

*"Dokus" Macdonald*

*Andrew "Tago" Maciver*

*Subs. used: Jordan Macleod (Kevin "Gochan" Macleod) 34; Gordon "Tago" Macdonald (Billy Anderson) 69; Callum "Beag" Mackay (Joe Armstrong) 76.*

*Subs. not used: Andrew "Lanky" Macdonald; Sven Wiltshire.*

**ATHLETIC: 4-4-2**

*Manager: Colin "Titch" Macritchie.*

*Andrew "Bernera" Morrison John MacIsaac*

*Connor Maciver Colin "Titch" Macritchie Kieran Bell Stuart "Bubble" Macdonald*

*Neil Ferguson Ali "Koch" Morrison (capt.) Lewis Macdonald Calum Masson*

*Craig Macleod*

*Subs. not used: Reece Montgomery; Anas Idris; Cameron Macleod.*

*Yellow card: Connor Maciver (serious foul play/dissent) 83.*

After their dismal opening to the season, Carloway's form appeared to be hotting up with four straight victories, which had catapulted them into third place in the League and a fascinating second round cup-tie at Avoch in the HAC. The reasons for this turnaround or resurgence (how to describe it is unclear) are vague: Andrew "Tago" Maciver's unsettling presence up front? A rock-hard back-line, commandeered by award-winning performances from Ali "Laxay" Macdonald and Donald "D.I." MacIennan? Billy Anderson's exquisite diagonals? Who knows?

The Blues have ground out, rather than finessed, their way to positive outcomes against Lochs (twice), Back, and Point. Athletic entered here under the radar, as it were, with lack of early cup success concealing reasonable League form, with two wins and a draw in five outings, Major departures and injury had damaged their

already-thin squad: Jordan Macleod had, of course, joined the Blues and Ross Allison was now in maroon; Nic "Nuck" Davis would only be occasionally available in help-out mode, while Gary Macleod, arguably the finest dead-ball taker on the island, required a second knee operation. Fortunately for the Hoops, Stuart "Bubble" Macdonald was fit again in right midfield, to back up defensive stalwart, Ali "Koch" Morrison, and Colin "Titch" Macritchie, the player-manager now inhabiting central midfield instead of the goal-line.

Ben Smith and Stuart "Gochan" Macleod were unavailable through suspension, while mainland work commitments ruled out Archie "Statto" Macdonald tonight. Thankfully, midfield maestro, Eachainn Miller, was now back on the island to assist prime *animateur*, Billy Anderson, in the central creativity department, while Gordon "Van Der Sar" once more deputized for the unavailable David Beaton. Further good news received tonight was Dan Crossley being given the all-clear to return to active duty.

Oddly enough, last season the sides' two League games had been their only confrontations. At Cnoc a' Choilich in early June, na Gormaich were in the midst of a great 7-match winning streak and dominated, thrashing in six, against Aths' three, with "Raymondo" and "Statto" each registering a pair, and Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald and Donald "D.I." MacIennan also contributing. Athletic at that time were having a poor season by their standards, languishing two places below their opponents and ten points behind Carloway in the League, with only three League victories to their name. However, two months later at Goathill, in the reverse fixture, the Blues thought the game was settled after 51 minutes, when they went 4-1 up, but then an injured Ali "Laxay" Macdonald departed the scene and the gods immediately punished such hubris, six goals being scored in an astonishing 16-minute second-half spree. Eventually na Gormaich were grateful to scramble home with a knife-edge 5-4 victory, thanks to goals from "D.I.", "Statto" (2); Jake Allan, and Andrew "Tago" Maciver.

The evening was overcast but pleasant, though the desired windlessness led to the first real infestation of midges for the diehards. George "Spy's" beautifully-cut pitch once again looked like a Turner exhibit as the Blues kicked off, after the minute's silence, towards the Butt. Both sides struggled at first to establish any form of coherent structure to their play in a very crowded central part of the field, and this in turn led to a litany of misplaced passes, aimless long balls, and lack of chances.

The first opportunity fell to the Blues in 10 minutes when a mighty Anderson free-kick from the centre circle came in high towards the Aths' right. Macleod came out to collect, about 10 metres in front of his right-hand post, but a heavy aerial Mackay challenge took the ball leftwards and outwards from his grasp. However, Ferguson was first to the loose ball to boot clear. Then, just as na Gormaich appeared to be combining more effectively to assert themselves in attack, the script suddenly veered wildly off track at the other end. From the Hoops' right touch-line, midway

within the Blues' half, "Bubble" delivered a perfect curling right-foot free-kick across the face of the Carloway goal. Macisaac got his head to it around the penalty spot, but "Van Der Sar" dropped instantly to push his glancing attempt wide from just inside his right-hand post. Maciver won the ball first, five metres from goal on the byeline, and turned the ball back in, where it knocked inwards off the unfortunate "D.I." by the near post and somehow managed to squeeze between the covering keeper and his post **(0-1)**.

An immediate break saw "Gochan" get clear down the Carloway right. Level with the box, he turned in and whipped a low ball across goal, but "Dokus's" flying right-foot hook, 16 metres out in the centre, went at least two metres wide of Macleod's right-hand post. In 20 minutes Miller reminded the fans of his potential with a sparkling run from midway within the Aths' half. He travelled forward and diagonally to the left, managed to fend off Masson, and make 10 metres from the Aths' right bye-line. His early bullet-like low cross eluded everyone before reaching "Gochan" inside the left of the Hoops' box, 16 metres from goal, but his attempted volley whizzed skywards at Warp speed. Four minutes later a "Dokus" free-kick, 22 metres from goal and to the Carloway left, was well-placed but easily read by the goalkeeper.

And then na Gormaich's patient approach paid off in a decisive four minutes which seemed to have sent the Blues well down the road to the three points. The captain won the ball with a crunching interception in the centre circle, wall-passed to Armstrong to move forward into the Aths' half on the left before supplying "Dokus", 10 metres in from the touch-line and 20 metres into the opposition half. He immediately looked up and sent a beautifully-balanced diagonal over "Koch's" head in the centre for "Tago" to ghost in behind him and wide of Ferguson towards the edge of the central box. Macleod was left stranded as he advanced and "Tago" coolly nodded the ball over him to score **(1-1)**.

Four minutes later it was "Tago" again who won the ball midway within the Aths' half in the centre, then fed "Gochan" square to his right. He broke forward at speed, then checked and cut in along the edge of the box past three defenders. Passing "Dokus" in the centre, he left the ball at his feet as he ran on and the wing-man flighted a delicately-struck lob-shot high to Macleod's left and just inside the junction of his left bar and post **(2-1)**.

It was 41 minutes before the Stornoway men reciprocated, when they made the right bye-line to cross high. Craigie raced out by his far post to fist clear outwards but the ball struck an advancing striker, five metres away, and Carloway had no little luck when the ball rebounded straight back into the keeper's arms. Two minutes later a classic low McIlroy defence-breaker from Anderson sent "Dokus" forward to the left edge of the box, but his left-foot drive saw a heavy deflection take most of the sting out of it and Macleod collected safely, low to his right. In the final moments Mackay found Jordan Macleod moving down the right touch-line to midway within the Aths' half. "Tago" came across to meet his high, inviting cross but his header soared high

and right of goal.

### Half-time: **Carloway 2 Stornoway Athletic 1**

It had been a less than inspired first-half display from the Blues, yet they had still edged possession and opportunity. How much the Blues' minds were on Saturday's tie, creating a subconscious desire not to do anything stupid tonight, was a possible excuse. However, there was still little light between the sides, and Carloway still appeared more likely to create, while the Stornoway men were more occupied containing. Again, however, the match departed drastically from the anticipated script. Though Anderson surprised everyone in 50 minutes with a free-kick from midway within the Hoops' half, on the Carloway left, which carried a couple of feet over the centre bar, the first real item on the second-half agenda arrived at the other end in 54 minutes.

A controversial goal arrived which left the Carloway camp much miffed. Slack play on the edge of the box resulted in Mackay, to the left, trying to poke the ball forward and clear. The ball rebounded back to him and he tried again. Again the ball rebounded back off an Athletic man, this time behind him to Andy Morrison lurking just inside the box, in a suspiciously-looking offside position. The striker immediately whipped a low right-footer across Craigie and just inside the keeper's far right-hand post (**2-2**). Cue massive protests and pointing to the line judge who had his flag raised. The referee spent an eternity consulting, then awarded the goal.

Immediately na Gormaich had a chance to restore their lead when Macleod left his marker down the right to send in a sharp low cross square across goal. The ball broke out far to "Dokus", 24 metres from goal on the left, but even though his low drive took a massive leftwards deflection, Macleod was able to get across smartly to his right to hold.

It was 68 minutes before Carloway carved out their next opportunity, when Miller one-twoed with Macleod to move rightwards from the centre circle and along the right touch-line. Twenty metres from the bye-line he slung over a high diagonal cross which "Tago" won on the penalty spot but could get little purchase on his header and Macleod did not have to move to hold.

A minute later the wheels really came off the bogey when the Stornoway men came forward down the right and the ball was crossed diagonally towards the Carloway box, then nodded out straight. Macisaac seized on it, turned left, then right, but as the Blues' defence stood off and retreated, he turned, in oceans of space, and from 24 metres, delivered a high, looping right-footer which sped high to Craigie's left and home (**2-3**).

There are many clichés around to describe the Blues' mood at this point; most unprintable. With 20 minutes remaining, both sides faced dilemmas. For na Gornaich, it was how to gear up and be more incisive; for Athletic, what next: go for

a fourth, a clincher, or batten down the hatches and hold what we have? Again, "Windy" gambled big, with the back four becoming three, Armstrong sacrificed, and Callum "Beag" Mackay introduced to add pace through the middle. However, it was the Stornoway men who threatened next, in 76 minutes, when a flashing break down their right saw Morrison escape wide of "Laxay" to send a sharp diagonal daisy-cutter across "Van Der Sar" from 22 metres but a metre wide of the far post.

In 83 minutes Mackay sent Miller off on another bewildering run from the centre-line towards the Carloway left. From the left touch-line, in line with the edge of the box, he sent in a high inward cross which "Tago" once again won with a head-glance but again was thwarted by an excellent Macleod hold, low to his right. An air of desperation propelled the Blues forward now. In 86 minutes "Beag" and "Dokus" combined to send Gordon "Tago" into the left of the Aths' box, but the keeper was out to block his crashing drive from 16 metres for a corner to his right. Moments later, a snap "Tago" drive from 20 metres on the Carloway left forced the young keeper to scramble frantically to his left to hold. In 87 minutes, a "Dokus" free-kick in the centre, midway within the Athletic half, was on target but gathered by Macleod, low to his right.

Just as "Bugsy" began checking his watch, relief arrived for the desperate home side. It was Miller again who was supplied by Mackay, moving diagonally left towards Athletic's right bye-line. He checked on the line, turned, and curled in an in-swinging right-foot cross which was too high for Macleod and Morrison towards their right-hand post, but just perfect for the arriving "Tago" to nod home, practically from the goal-line, by the far post (3-3).

**Full-time: Carloway 3 (2) Stornoway Athletic 3 (1)**

So, the question for both sides was: a point won, or two lost? Who had "*deserved*" to win, if such a verb is relevant in sport? It was unhelpful for the home side that after "Dokus" had put na Gormaich 2-1 ahead, a form of complacency seemed to creep into the Blues' performance that suggested that they felt the job was more or less done and that continuation of their present level of performance would inexorably deliver victory. Or perhaps energy was being saved for their monumental task on Saturday?

However, an Athletic side appeared in the second half determined to "*have a go*" and soon blew that arrogance down valley and succeeded in leaving Carloway in the unenviable, if common in sport, position of embarking on a frantic final 20-minute chase for salvation. Carloway could reasonably complain that they were rather unlucky with Aths' first two goals, but team performances tonight were still slightly below the mark set in their previous outings, especially those against Lochs and Point. Despite the return of the inspirational Miller to augment Anderson and Mackay in midfield, the pace and aggression of a young Hoops' side still unsettled the Blues hugely in the centre of the park, and, once again, "Tago" was left with the work of three men to perform.

**Carloway Man of the Match: Andrew “Tago” Maciver.**

**Stornoway Athletic Man of the Match: Craig Macleod.**