

Lewis and Harris League:

## **Ness 2 (1) Carloway 6 (2)**

*Jack Dunlop 38, 64     Angus Grant 41, 54, 79  
Dan Crossley 43, 53  
Jordan Macleod 61*

*At Fivepenny, Ness.*

*Wednesday, 12.7.17.*

*Referee: Derek Nicolson.*

*Ness line judge: Alasdair Dunlop*

*Carloway line judge: Uisdean Reid.*

**CARLOWAY:** 4-4-2.

*Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.*

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

*Gordon "Van Der Sar" Craigie*

*Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur   Domhnall Mackay (capt.)   Ali "Laxay" Macdonald   Joe  
Armstrong*

*Jordan Macleod   Dan Crossley   Callum "Beag" Mackay   Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald  
Kevin "Gochan" Macleod   Angus Grant*

*Subs. used: Sven Wiltshire (Dan Crossley) 79; Matthew Murray (Kevin "Gochan" Macleod)  
83; Stuart "Gochan" Macleod (Callum "Beag" Mackay) 89; Andrew "Lanky" Macdonald (Joe  
Armstrong) 90.*

*Sub. Not used: Andrew Macleod*

It was already mid-July, yet, surprisingly, this was the two sides' first meeting of the season because of postponements, etc. It couldn't have come at a more interesting time for the Blues as they knew that victory tonight would propel them to the top of the League, two points ahead of deadly rivals, neighbours Westside, with six matches to play. Victory would leave third-placed Point seven points adrift and set up 21st July's League derby at Cnoc a' Choilich as a possible title-decider.

Such a prediction would have seemed unthinkable around 8 p.m. on 1st May, after the Blues' third gubbing on the trot from a rampant Westside team who had all the appearance of the team *du jour* of 2017, looking likely to sweep all before them this season. However, since that wretched evening, na Gormaich have metamorphosed into the most difficult side to beat on the islands, winning ten games and drawing only one, their only reverse being in the HAC at Avoch. Even then, they held the top Black Isle side for 87 minutes!

Credit must go to the management - and the players, of course - for turning things round so dramatically, but special mention must be made of the return of Andrew "Tago" Maciver's power and drive to central midfield; and the creative imagination of Eachainn Miller and Dan Crossley on either side of him. And how much more influence on proceedings will "Raymondo" have when he is fully-fit?

Last season the Niseachs must have been sick of the sight of the Blues, suffering defeats in four meetings and unable to compete in the fifth. An early 3-1 victory for na Gormaich in the ABC Cup at Cnoc a' Choilich set Carloway up nicely to administer a 5-0 League mauling at Fivepenny at the end of May,

courtesy of goals from Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald, Archie "Statto" MacDonald, Dan Crossley, Jake Allan, and Kevin "Barra" Macneil. Remember them? Late July and early August saw three straight wins for the Blues: 4-2 away and 5-2 at home in an EaF Semi-Final, then a 3-0 win awarded in the home League fixture as Ness were unable to send a team.

For the Blues, the main disappointment tonight was the call-off of rock-solid centre of defence, Donald "D.I." MacIennan, with a foot injury, which necessitated holding midfielder, Domhnall Mackay, dropping back to support Ali "Laxay" Macdonald in central defence. This further weakened the power element in central midfield as ball-of-fire, Andrew "Tago" Maciver, was still absent due to attending weddings. Fortunately, Dan Crossley, who had been unwell earlier, chose to play and started between young stars, Jordan Macleod and Callum "Beag" Mackay, with "Dokus" staying left. Further good news was the re-appearance of the explosive, if mercurial, talent of fans' favourite, Kevin "Gochan" Macleod, up front to the right of goal-getter, Angus Grant.

The Wednesday timing seemed to have affected attendance as, even on a glorious wind-free evening like tonight, with no midges either, Ness kicked off into the setting sun in front of sparsely populated terracings. Carloway soon gained the initiative with calm, if sedentary, build-ups which spread the Ness back-line, allowing Grant opportunities to move unhindered into the box. Ness, as always, were eager, over-eager in fact, no doubt wishing to atone for their Co-op misery versus Southend, but constantly gave the ball away.

In 5 minutes "Laxay", on the centre line, slotted the ball low and leftwards to Jordan Mac. moving into the box but his crisp right-foot daisy-cutter went straight into the keeper's arms. In 10 minutes a "Dokus" free-kick, midway within the Ness half on Carloway's left touch-line, picked out Grant perfectly on the penalty spot but his header went a metre outside the Niseach left-hand post. Two minutes later Grant was supplied by Mackay, just inside the Blues' half on the left and took off on a searing run which saw him out-pace the Ness defenders and allowed him to reach the bye-line. He checked, turned back, and whipped a vicious high cross across the Niseach box. "Gochan" appeared unmarked, 14 metres out by the far post, but the ball was a fraction too high for him and his snatched header cleared the left-side bar by a foot.

Ness eventually replied with two free-kick attempts in rapid succession, both taken by Russell-Smith. In 20 minutes a right-foot attempt from just outside the right-hand corner of the Carloway box zoomed a metre over the bar. Then, a minute later, from 22 metres out in the centre, he hit the target but lacked power and "Van Der Sar" held easily to his left.

In 28 minutes Grant again came close when a Macleod corner from the Ness left cleared the ruck to reach him by the far post, 12 metres out, but his powerful header was straight down at the keeper by the near post and safely held. Six minutes later "Dokus" found "Gochan" moving down the right. He outpaced two defenders, then tried to find Grant diagonally forward of him inside the right of the box. The ball ricocheted back to him but he picked out

the striker with a second attempt. However, the young star's first-time right-footer was beaten away by the goalie by the near post. A minute later a Grant free-kick, 35 metres from goal in the centre, came in high and accurate, but was held comfortably under the bar.

Then suddenly, in 38 minutes the League contenders were given a nasty surprise when, out of nothing, the locals decided to ignore the script and take the lead. A break down the Niseach right saw the winger freed between Mackay and Armstrong to make 16 metres from the bye-line. His sharp cut-back found Dunlop by the near corner of the box, and his early low right-foot strike was tucked home neatly, low to Craigie's left, though the keeper did get a hand to it (1-0).

Na Gormaich immediately upped the tempo, and the equalizer did not take long. In 41 minutes "Gochan" received the ball from Crossley on the right and he out-paced his marker to the bye-line before tricking his way past him and inwards. He looked up and sent the sweetest of cut-backs to Callum "Beag", 16 metres out by the near post. Mackay couldn't connect but the ball ran on to the arriving Grant and he stroked the ball home effortlessly, deep into the Niseach left-hand corner (1-1).

Two minutes later "Gochan" showed it was no fluke by reprising his performance, making 12 metres from the line this time and cutting square, the ball coming through inch-perfect to Crossley, directly in front of goal in oceans of space, and he flicked the ball home nonchalantly to the keeper's right (1-2).

### Half-time: **Ness 1 Carloway 2**

For 37 minutes this game had had the look of a 0-0 draw written all over it, featuring a bunch of guys who looked like a squad of workmen forced to come in on their day off, but the Dunlop strike had suddenly awakened a slumbering ability within the Blues' ranks and maybe was about to achieve the opposite effect to that which the Niseachs had hoped. Certainly when Dan Crossley is fit and well and eager, and "Gochan" is on-message, anything can happen, and their appetite, pace, and aggression unsurpassed. However, doubts were now apparent about whether the star midfielder *animateur*, so crucial to Carloway's performances, should continue.

Ness went for an immediate break-through, an instant break-back against a confident foe. In 49 minutes another Russell-Smith free-kick, this time on the Ness left touch-line, midway within the Carloway half, came winging in high to the near post. Craigie saw it coming, high at his right-hand post, but couldn't get a clean catch, because of the obstructing cluster of bodies. The ball broke clear; there was an untidy scramble, the ball bouncing upwards dangerously; and then "Laxay" managed to head it away to the right, and then it was booted down-field. This led to a free-kick 22metres from Craigie, in the centre, but Rush-Taylor's left-footer went well-over.

Unfortunately, that proved to be the last hurrah for the men from the Butt in their pursuit of a point or victory as the earlier undignified melée in Craigie's

6-metre-box evidently energized the visitors into upping the tempo once more. Immediately they came forth in numbers, exploiting the pace of Jordan Mac. and "Gochan" wide, and Callum "Beag" and Grant through the centre, all orchestrated by Crossley and "Dokus" in the centre, although "Raymondo" wasn't slow to join the front-runners.

In 53 minutes "Dokus" freed Jordan Mac. down the left and his pace gave him time to deliver a high, searching diagonal to the far post where "Gochan" controlled the difficult ball, then drove at goal from 14 metres. Morrison managed to block it but it spun wide across goal to the left, where the approaching Crossley forced it home despite the keeper's despairing fingertips half-blocking the ball on its way in (1-3).

A minute later another push led to a Jordan Mac. corner on the Niseach left being headed out to the right by Morrison, only for Crossley to return it low across goal behind the advancing line. Grant reacted first to leave the line and fire it home to the keeper's left from 12 metres (1-4).

Ness tried to get a grip on proceedings and pushed forward, but lost the ball on the edge of the Carloway box to Mackay who transferred it out immediately to "Laxay" moving forward. The centre-half then set off rightwards on one of his trademark runs towards the right touch-line. Midway within the Ness half, he lost the ball but took advantage of a lucky ricochet to move diagonally leftwards towards the near corner of the box, where he released it into the box. Grant couldn't quite make it but the ball ran on to the speeding Macleod, unmarked 12 metres from goal and in behind the line, and he was only too happy to thunder his first goal for the club under the keeper to his left (1-5).

A reply arrived quickly in 61 minutes when a long ball from the Ness left centre line carried over the high Carloway back-line, allowing Dunlop to ghost in in the centre, and knee the ball over the approaching Craigie from the penalty spot (2-5), but by then the Blues had assumed exhibition mode and no one appeared to really care.

In 75 minutes Rush-Taylor had another attempt from 22 metres, from towards the Niseach left touch-line, but again the ball went high over. Three minutes later yet another Ness break through the centre saw an attempted breaker directly forward glance leftwards off "Laxay's" outstretched left leg, allowing "Titch" to rush in on Craigie, but his careful chip hit the keeper on the chest and was held. In 79 minutes the home side's misery was finally complete when a long ball from the Blues' captain, midway within the Ness half in the centre, picked out "Gochan" perfectly, breaking down the right. Twenty metres from the line he squared the ball to Grant on the near edge of the box, and the young hit-man stroked a beautiful low daisy-cutter across the keeper and neatly inside the far corner of goal for his hat-trick (2-6).

**Full-time: Ness 2 (1) Carloway 6 (2)**

Pelé tended to be dismissive of England's style of play in his day, saying that, *"They win the ball; they run about; they lose the ball; they run about; they win*

*the ball;.....* “, and so on. Certainly, Continentals considered British football one pace physical aggression, whereas they found it easy to alter the tempo of a game at will, to suit the circumstances of any contest. Tonight Carloway seemed to have adopted the latter technique *par excellence*, coasting along with a gentle structured cohesion, punctured occasionally by a sudden flurry of penetration. The approach they employ against the likes of Ness, or United, etc., for instance, suggests a form of arrogance, a knowingness that they feel that simply by playing competently within their strengths, they are bound to win - eventually. The goals will surely come. It's a style not seen too often against Westside, or Point, or Lochs.

The worst thing Ness could have done tonight was to open the scoring just shortly before half-time, because Carloway's game-view was thereby given a nasty jolt, and a firing pistol went off in their heads. Suddenly, their approach changed, the ambling stopped, and they came at the Niseachs with all guns blazing. A similar response greeted the goalmouth scramble at the beginning of the second half. However, when Carloway did decide to open up and take things seriously, they proved to be uncontainable, creating chance after chance with ease, and it can only be hoped that when “Togo” and “D.I.” return, this will be the operating mode in the much more challenging games that are to come, when cups and league titles are at stake.

**Ness Man of the Match: Micheil Russell-Smith.**

**Carloway Man of the Match: Dan Crossley.**