

Lewis and Harris League:

Carloway 5 (0) Stornoway Athletic 0 (0)

Domhnall Mackay 53
Callum Masson 55, 67
Kevin "Gochan" Macleod 8
Callum "Beag" Mackay 83

At Cnoc a' Choilich, Carloway
Friday 27th April 2018, 18:30

Referee: Andrew Macaulay
Carloway line judge: Angus "Dee" Macarthur
Athletic line judge: Magnus Johnson

CARLOWAY: 4-5-1.

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

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

David Beaton

*Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Donald "D.I." MacIennan Archie MacDonald Joe Armstrong
Callum Masson Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Murdo "Squegg" Macleod Stuart "Bubble" MacDonald
Kevin "Gochan" Macleod ■*

Neil Sinclair

Subs. used: Billy Anderson (Murdo "Squegg" Macleod) 77; Callum "Beag" Mackay (Callum Masson) 81; Matthew Murray (Donald "D.I." MacIennan) 83; Andrew "Lanky" MacDonald (Joe Armstrong) 84; Calum Mackay (Neil Sinclair) 85.

Subs. not used: none.

Yellow cards: Kevin "Gochan" Macleod (serious foul play) 27.

ATHLETIC: 4-4-2

Manager: Magnus Johnson

Mikey Jones Kieron Bell

*Colin "Titch" Macritchie (capt.) Sean "Bayble" Macleod ■ Darren Stewart ■ Connor Maciver
James Muir Ross Macrae Lewis Macdonald Murdo Macleod
Reece Montgomery*

Subs. : Leo Swanson (Murdo Macleod) 70; Andrew Duncan (James Muir) 76.

Yellow cards: Darren Stewart (serious foul play) 28; Sean "Bayble" Macleod (serious foul play) 46.

After referee Calum "Chancey" Macleod blew the final whistle at Garrabost a week back Monday, the Blues' Chairman was heard to remark, "*Well, at least we're three goals better off than we were at this point last season.*" Accentuate the positives is always good advice, as in, "*Our performance may have been sub-standard tonight, but hey! We only shipped four!!!*". Of course, last year Carloway did learn from a similar whipping at Barvas in their League opener, and only five days later began that scintillating rollercoaster charge towards the title, with a 3-2 victory at Creagan Dubh, of all places.

Tonight was an opportunity to emulate that feat, curiously enough against the only side to take League points from na Gormaich at Cnoc a' Choilich in 2017. Indeed, it took a stoppage-time equalizer from "Tago" to deny the Stripes all three and thus

lengthen Carloway's undefeated home League run to 12 games, their last home League defeat being on 20th May, 2016, 1-3, to Lochs.

Whether or not Athletic could reproduce that form tonight was debatable, considering the multiple departures from their squad and 1-5 League thrashing by Ness: Stuart "Bubble" MacDonald and Callum Masson now wore blue, not black and white, while long-standing stopper, Ali "Koch" Morrison, had retired and Scott "Flapjack" Macaulay had opted for a year's sabbatical. There was no sign of Nic "Nuck" Davis either, and only two men on the bench. On the plus side, the Stornoway side had signed up ex-Blue, Ross Macrae, along with John Woodman, while midfield *animateur*, Colin "Titch" Macritchie, and eternal attack threat, Connor Maciver, still featured.

Circumstances forced several changes to the Blues' squad from last Saturday's "game of two halves" at Paible: Warren Mackay and Kenny "Dokus" MacDonald were unavailable but Archie MacDonald returned to make his one hundredth appearance for the club, while Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur had recovered from illness to return on the right. David Beaton, as expected, took over from Gordon "Van Der Sar" Craigie in goal, while Callum "Beag" Mackay, outstanding in an unfamiliar role in Uist, was unlucky to drop to the bench beside returnee, Billy Anderson, Andrew "Lanky" MacDonald, Matthew Murray, and, incredibly, Calum "Killer" Mackay, not seen in blue since before the Flood. Murdo "Squegg" Macleod now featured in left midfield also and to his left stood the mercurial presence of explosive fans' favourite, Kevin "Gochan" Macleod.

It was the kind of Spring evening most of us have forgotten was once standard on the island: bright sunlight in a cloudless sky; a complete absence of wind; and the slightest trace of warmth, as the sides squared up on a beautifully-prepared pitch. Unfortunately, events on the pitch in the first 45 minutes failed to match the idyllic setting, as both teams struggled to impose a coherent shape on proceedings. A record must have been set for how often the ball was given away in a 45 minute-period on Lewis and this, in turn, led to a plethora of petty fouls. It was the 12th minute before the first "chance" arrived. A Masson free-kick from midway within the Aths' half, on the Blues' left touch-line was repelled by Muir at the near post and Masson followed up, but his return was slightly overhit and Sinclair, 12 metres out beyond the far post, could not get under it and it flew high over the bar.

Na Gormaich came closer in the 20th minute when a "Squegg" free-kick from just inside Athletic's half, 10 metres from the right touch-line, was reverse-headed square by his captain, 12 metres out by the far post. The spinning ball was met solidly by Sinclair in front of goal but Montgomery reacted instinctively to push the ball on to the top of the bar and over. A minute later a low, right-foot "Titch" free-kick from just inside the Blues' half, on the left touch-line, somehow ran straight through the assembled ruck without a touch to Beaton. In 25 minutes an enormous Beaton kick-out was headed on backwards in the centre circle by Masson and "Bubble" tried his luck from 24 metres in the centre but his immediate right-foot strike raced a couple of metres wide of Athletic's left-hand post.

On the half-hour the Stripes finally threatened when a free-kick from all of 35 metres on Athletic's left touch-line was swung in high by Macrae. Beaton seemed to lose it

as he squinted into the sun but managed to touch the high curving right-footer a foot outside his left-hand post at the last minute.

In 35 minutes an amazing run by “Bubble” took him from midway within his own half past three opponents to the right edge of the opposing half, before squaring the ball left to the accompanying “Squegg” but the midfielder, usually deadly in such situations, seemed to hit the ball into the ground and his right-footer trickled harmlessly to Montgomery. Six minutes later clever play in the left corner by “Gochan” saw him play the ball back to the approaching Armstrong, Twenty-five metres from goal, his attempted cross was blocked back to him but his second was headed on in the centre by Mackay, then played back by the far post by Sinclair to Masson, 20 metres from goal, but his crisp low right-footer was at least two metres outside Montgomery’s left-hand post.

Moments later the same player was freed down the right by a delightful “Bubble” diagonal inside Muir. He made the edge of the box before squaring to the waiting Sinclair, but though the striker connected fiercely, it went straight to the young keeper.

Half-time: Carloway 0 Stornoway Athletic 0

It had been a less than riveting first-half, despite the best efforts and commitment of the participants. Listening for the first cuckoo up by Sraid Sheumais proved more interesting. Athletic rarely came forward or threatened, despite “Titch’s” intelligent delivery and Maciver’s drives forward, while Carloway, though willing, seemed to be experiencing the same lack of cohesion they exhibited in the opening half at Paible. Perhaps the changed line-up didn’t help, plus the altered framework, which was hard to read. It seemed mainly to consist of a back three - “Tiger”/“D.I.”/Archie MacDonald - with Mackay in a Makélélé role, sometimes even as a David Hay-type enforcer, although, at times, “Tiger” surged down the right, with the captain sinking back to augment the line. Likewise, Masson seemed to be combining at least three roles: conventional right-winger; roving *trequartista*; and twin striker beside Sinclair, who desperately needed support; “Gochan”, of course, was unclassifiable, shape-shifting constantly through Willian, Dušan Tadić, and Diego Costa.

Whatever, “Windy” seemed to have dished out the same Bovril he gave the “lads” in Paible, as the Blues burst from the traps and rushed forward against the Stripes. MacDonald won the ball in the centre, on the edge of his own area, and found “Bubble” in front of him, who switched immediately to “Tiger” breaking into the Aths’ half. The early ball forward found Masson, whose cross, 18 metres from the line, reached Sinclair coming towards him by the near post. The striker flicked the ball with his left foot round his marker and from 16 metres drove in a ferocious low right-foot drive, which the approaching Montgomery blocked brilliantly with his right leg.

However, in 53 minutes Carloway found the break-through, and yet again it came from “Bubble” releasing “Tiger” down the right. Twenty metres from the line he fired over a low cross which Masson met just inside the near box, then stepped right. His effort was charged down and rebounded straight out to Mackay, 20 metres from goal. The captain had time to control the ball before cracking in an unstoppable right-foot drive to the keeper’s left (**1-0**).

Two minutes later, the Blues widened the gap, when a high clearance downfield by Mackay cleared the back-line and allowed "Bubble" and Sinclair to test Macrae and Macdonald for pace. Montgomery spotted the danger and raced out of his box to boot high and clear downfield. Unfortunately, however, for the 16-year-old, the ball dropped on the halfway line perfectly for Masson and he instantly side-footed a high lob back downfield over the stranded keeper to bounce slowly into the net. Bad luck, but beautifully-taken! **(2-0)**.

Athletic started to wobble dangerously at this point and two minutes later a high Masson corner from the Carloway left could not be held by Montgomery at his far post and the loose ball ping-ponged around the 6-metre box as first "Bubble", then Mackay, tried to force it home, Macdonald eventually booting it off the line and away. Nevertheless, the Blues stretched their lead in 67 minutes, when a misunderstanding between Macritchie and Macleod on the left centre-line saw "Tiger" and Masson win the ball, then pick out "Bubble" moving into the Aths' half. With the back-line out of position, he made the right bye-line before cutting the ball back to an unguarded Masson inside the near box, and from 16 metres the striker stroked a low right-footer across Montgomery and home off the inside of the far post **(3-0)**.

A tiring Aths' side was fast losing heart as Carloway came forward relentlessly. In 76 minutes a Masson corner on the left reached MacDonald 12 metres out by the far post but his powerful reverse-header flew a metre wide of Montgomery's right-hand post. Three minutes later Mackay read a Jones slip to Bell and picked out Sinclair, breaking down the right. He charged forward, then cut in along the 18-metre line, before slipping the ball to "Gochan" on his left. Again, Montgomery saw it coming and rushed out to block brilliantly. However, from the resultant Masson corner on the left, the ball was headed on across goal and "Gochan", lurking on the edge of the 6-metre box towards the far post, knocked it home **(4-0)**.

Three minutes later Anderson won the ball in the centre circle and immediately whipped round to his left to send a perfect Jimmy McIlroy between Macrae and Macdonald for Callum "Beag" to come in square along edge of the box from the left. He evaded Macdonald's lunging foot and as Montgomery advanced, sent a low right-footer past him to his left **(5-0)**.

Athletic's agony was not quite over, however, as an 86th minute Callum "Beag" corner from the right led to a melée in front of goal before breaking out to "Bubble", 22 metres from goal on the right. His first attempt was mishit, but the ball rebounded straight back to him and this time he recovered to whack the ball against the top of the bar and over.

Full-time: Carloway 5 (0) Stornoway Athletic 0 (0)

In their last two fixtures, na Gormaich have taken a half to find their shape and rhythm, but once settled, they have been convincing thereafter. A changing line-up doesn't help but clearly depends on circumstance and the opposition (par for the course, up here). It's one for the armchair philosophers to decide which approach is more effective: a back three - "Tiger"/"D.I."/MacDonald - with Mackay as holding midfielder, but allowing "Tiger"/Callum "Beag" to surge down the right when

appropriate, the captain sinking back to defend.

Also, tactics place much responsibility on Callum Masson who combines at least three roles: right-winger/*trequartista*/striker, while Neil Sinclair has a rather thankless task up front, frequently isolated as he leads the line. Archie MacDonald's influence is sorely missed further forward, as attacking left-sided midfielder or striker.

Magnus Johnson would probably be delighted to have these selection problems. You wonder where the local game is heading when you consider that it was only six years ago that the Stripes won the Championship and were runners-up the following year, yet last night they were struggling to get a team: the goalkeeper was only playing his second game - aged 16; the right-back his second game and the left-back making his *début*; Mikey Jones is only 15; Kieran Bell a boy too. After a period of success, 2007-12, Back experienced this problem as well. North Uist had similar problems too: an ageing squad playing on because young talent is no longer emerging in the same numbers as it used to, for multiple reasons: changing societal habits (the young are just not as interested as they once were, perhaps); emigration from the island, and so on. One day your older players decide to retire, or make fewer appearances, and suddenly you are scrambling to find players.

Carlway Man of the Match: Kevin "Gochan" Macleod.

Athletic Man of the Match: Connor Maciver.