

Lewis and Harris League:

Carloway 2 (2) Lochs 4 (2)

Callum Masson 41

Gordon "Tago" MacDonald 5

Kevin "Gochan" Macleod 45+1 John "Uig" Morrison 13, 56 (pen.)

David Macmillan 79

At Cnoc a' Choilich, Carloway

Wednesday 9th May 2018, 19:00

Referee: Kenneth "Bugsy" Smith

Carloway line judge: Calum "Cobby" Macleod

Lochs line judge: Calum Murdo Mackenzie

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 Archie MacDonald Joe Armstrong
Callum Masson Stuart "Bubble" MacDonald Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Murdo "Squegg" Macleod
Andy "Bernera" Morrison*

Kevin "Gochan" Macleod ■

Subs. used: Callum "Beag" Mackay (Andy "Bernera" Morrison) 62; Billy Anderson (Murdo "Squegg" Macleod) 76.

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

Yellow cards: Kevin "Gochan" Macleod (serious foul play) 37.

LOCHS: 4-4-2

Manager: Kevin Anderson

Jim O'Donnell Lewis Mackenzie

*Gordon "Tago" MacDonald Andy Murray John "Uig" Morrison David Macmillan
Daniel "Nipper" Mackenzie Peter "Robbie" Mackenzie Peter Mackenzie (capt.) Darren "Cage"
Wilson*

James Macleod

*Subs. : Robert Mackenzie (Gordon "Tago" MacDonald) 62; Calum Campbell (David Macmillan) 83;
Joe Murray (Andy Murray) 86.*

Yellow cards: None.

Last season Westside seemed to be the team the Blues could not avoid in the early fixtures. Soundly thumped three times by the Barvas men in their first four matches, the Blues were swiftly dumped out of the ABC and Jock Stein Cups. This certainly simplified the Blues' early fixture list. This year, Lochs appear to be the team they cannot avoid as they arrived tonight for the second of their three early fixtures at Cnoc a' Choilich, having already edged the Blues out of the ABC Cup a month ago, 0-1. That had been a close-run affair, with Carloway perhaps a shade unfortunate to receive an early Cup exit, a decent first-half display concluding with a Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald cracker being touched on to the bar by James Macleod. Overall, the Blues did perform creditably in the Cup-tie, despite the changes necessitated by the comings/goings during the close season. Their defensive rock, Ali "Laxay" Macdonald, and veteran, Gordon "Tago" Macdonald, now wore maroon, while ace

strikers, Andrew "Tago" Maciver and Angus Grant, were no longer available; Donald "D.I." MacIennan was also injured that night.

Since then, of course, Carloway have plumbed the depths, 1-4 in the League at Garrabost, but recovered to progress in the Coop Cup, 4-1 versus North Uist United at Paible, and 5-0 here in the League against struggling Athletic twelve days ago. However, their best line-up, and hence a settled team, is still open to debate. Tonight, minor finessing to 27th April's squad was necessary: "Dokus" was still injured, while David Beaton, Warren Mackay, and Neil Sinclair were unavailable. Therefore, Gordon "Van Der Sar" Craigie returned in goal while Andy "Bernera" Morrison was preferred over Callum "Beag" Mackay in left midfield, allowing Kevin "Gochan" Macleod to replace Sinclair as front man.

The Dads' Army squad that faced them in maroon bristled with experience and talent, honed over the years to collect countless titles and trophies: the Mackenzie back-line - Peter; Peter "Robbie"; "Nipper" (no "Laxay") - protected the best keeper on the islands - James Macleod - while supporting a midfield that had won it all, in Macmillan; John "Uig"; "Tago"; and the best creative midfielder in Lewis and Harris, the ageless Andy Murray. Fortunately for the Blues, Angie Campbell was there only as a spectator and Robert Mackenzie risked on the bench alone. Ross Allison may have been absent, but, unfortunately, ace striker, Jim O'Donnell, wasn't.

Conditions were not conducive to controlled, creative football, in the air anyway, as a gale-force sou'easterly swept Carloway forward in chaotic style towards Macleod. Broken play punctuated the opening exchanges as both sides tried to keep the ball low and, in Carloway's case, judge the forward high breakers appropriately. Then, suddenly, after 5 minutes, Lochs stunned na Gormaich. Swift intervention by Peter M., then interplay between Murray, "Uig", and Macmillan on the centre line, saw the midfielder move forward to deliver a perfect diagonal behind Armstrong and free "Cage" to race towards the line. A low squared cross, 16 metres from the bye-line, was just ahead of O'Donnell and the covering "D.I." and MacDonald but coursed across to the far corner of the box for an unmarked "Tago" to take time to place his reverse-shot waist-high across Craigie and inside the keeper's left-hand post (**0-1**).

Three minutes later came Carloway's first opportunity when Masson, 22 metres from the bye-line, on the right touch-line, fired in a low rasping free-kick but, surprisingly, no one got a touch before Macleod held well, low in front of his goal-line. In 13 minutes more misery descended on the Blues when another rapid break sliced through an uncertain defence. Again, Lochs broke fast on the right, within their own half, with Macmillan trying to find Wilson moving into the Carloway half. Armstrong got there first but his attempted clearance whacked off John "Uig" and back behind him. Midway within his own half, the covering "D.I." moved left to clear from the approaching O'Donnell, but as he connected he lost his footing and fell, and the ball rebounded inwards behind him. As O'Donnell moved past him, he pulled the striker down, but the referee allowed the advantage as the supporting John "Uig" had arrived unmarked and, spotting Craigie who had advanced to aid "D.I.", stranded 12 metres out of goal, coolly lobbed him from 20 metres (**0-2**).

The central part of Cnoc a' Choilich was now as congested as Sauchiehall Street on a Saturday night, as "Bubble", Mackay, and "Squegg" all fought for space, head-to-

head with Macmillan, John "Uig", and the pushing Peter M., while Murray roamed ubiquitously, too elusive to be pinned down by any Blue. "Tiger" also pushed forward repeatedly in support of known chance-taker, Masson, but this drew the back-line right, leaving Armstrong in uncertain territory to face the encroaching "Cage".

In 33 minutes a Peter M. free-kick, 24 metres from the bye-line, towards the left, was rebuffed in the area by Mackay and rebounded back towards the defender following up. Twenty metres from goal, just outside the left corner of the box, Mackenzie met it first-time with a blazing left-footer which would have gone through the net if it hadn't gone across goal and two metres outside "Van Der Sar's" left-hand post.

Lochs were gaining an edge but in 40 minutes the unexpected happened; a Lochs' surge was broken up in the Carloway area and the ball moved forward to Mackay, who played the early ball downfield towards the left, over the heads of the high back-line. The Mackenzies looked at the line judge as "Gochan" raced forward but "Cage" had played him on and the grateful striker sped on to the left touch-line. Sixteen metres from the line, he squared a nasty low feeder, which the arriving Masson got his right foot to in front of his marker, directly in front of goal. Macleod seemed to grasp his sharp flick but was unable to prevent the difficult ball going home (1-2).

In the first minute of added-on time, an astonishing turnaround was completed when the twin strikers reversed their roles. Again the long ball came forward from the edge of the Carloway box, this time heading right. Masson beat the line to roar behind "Nipper" to control the ball and cross, square, low, and hard, 16 metres from the bye-line. The racing "Gochan" easily outpaced the Mackenzies to side-foot past the helpless Macleod directly in front of goal (2-2).

Half-time: Carloway 2 Lochs 2

The conversations over the half-time Boveril must have been interesting in both dressing-rooms. Lochs appeared to have had the game under control, as Carloway struggled to settle at the back and gain a grip in midfield. Then, suddenly, in a 5-minute period, the home side managed to harness the wind effectively - twice, a feat that had eluded them for the previous 40 minutes.

How well would the sides dealt with the conditions reversed? Immediately, David Macmillan answered that question with a perfectly floated right-footer from just inside the Carloway half, on the left touch-line. The inviting diagonal was met expertly by O' Donnell on the central edge of the box, but his header was a shade too high and wide of Craigie's right-hand junction of bar and post.

Moments later, a combined drive through the centre by Mackay and "Bubble" saw both players' paths blocked and as they tried to dig the ball out of the ruck, the ball ricocheted right, and was chased by "Gochan". Sixteen metres from the right touch-line, he whipped it back, square leftwards across goal. "Bubble" momentarily had a clear sight of goal, but his thumping low drive raced a metre outside Macleod's left-hand drive.

Just as the game appeared about to hot up as a contest, the home side were suddenly deflated by a curious decision. In 56 minutes a Lochs attack was broken

up on the central fringe of the Carloway box and as Mackay and O'Donnell competed with raised legs for the breaking ball, the whistle went. Everyone froze, unsure of what had been awarded. First, it looked like a foul given to the Blues, then the Lochs, then realization dawned that the referee was pointing to the spot. Apparently, it was for dangerous play by Mackay, showing his studs in the challenge. Oops!. However, John "Uig" asked no questions and as Craigie chose left, whacked a perfect strike deep into his right-hand corner (2-3).

It was a body blow to the home side but they responded in 61 minutes when a MacDonald free-kick, 22 metres out on the left corner of the Lochs' box, was lifted carefully over the wall, only to be read comfortably by Macleod, high under his central bar.

Lochs next threatened in 71 minutes when a fierce O'Donnell free-kick from the right touchline, 22 metres from the bye-line, came rocketing in on "Van Der Sar" but he successfully pushed it over his bar. The first corner from the Lochs left was repulsed but the second was met square-on by O'Donnell in the centre, 12 metres from goal, but his bullet header zoomed a couple of feet over the left side of the bar.

Three minutes later Lady Fortune almost delivered a surprise equalizer for the Blues. Mackay won the ball in the centre circle and played it straight forward to the charging "Bubble". He was crowded out in the centre by the Mackenzies and John "Uig", but managed to trick his way cleverly to the right. He made 16 metres from the byeline, then whipped round to deliver a square ball across goal. However, a heavy deflection off Peter "Robbie" spun the ball inward to the top corner of the near-side of goal. An alert Macleod reacted instinctively and just managed to paw the ball for a corner at the last moment.

Nevertheless, the contest was all over five minutes later when an over-committed Carloway, chasing a late equalizer, were once more caught out at the back. A sudden break out of defence saw "Cage" progress down the right touch-line in his own half and pick out Mackenzie on the centre-line. He side-stepped Armstrong inwards and his whipped diagonal forward went beyond a lunging "D.I." to reach O'Donnell, bursting unhindered through the centre. "Van Der Sar" was out like a flash and reacted brilliantly, low down to his left, to push away the striker's low drive from 20 metres. However, the supporting Macmillan was first to the loose ball and calmly swept it high into the unguarded net (2-4).

Two minutes later the evening almost darkened further for the Blues when Robert Mackenzie, midway within the Carloway half, on the left touch-line, moved in square off "Tiger", then past Anderson, before whipping round suddenly to thump a wicked low right-footer against the base of Craigie's post from 20 metres.

Carloway's final hurrah came in 83 minutes when an Anderson free-kick, midway within the Lochs half and 10 metres in from the touch-line, led to an incredible mêlée around the Maroons' penalty spot, before being booted clear, then returned high towards the right by "D.I." Masson controlled it expertly towards Macleod's left-hand post, 12 metres out, fainted this way and that, then stepped to his marker's right, before placing a careful right-footer across Macleod but, unfortunately, a foot outside the far post.

A final heart-stopper for the home crowd was a John "Uig" free-kick deep in added-on time, which flew in from 24 metres, towards the left touch-line, thudded against the top of Carloway's right-hand bar, and disappeared into the night.

Full-time: Carloway 2 (2) Lochs 4 (2)

The first question to be answered, of course, is: should football matches be played in such adverse weather conditions? Ice and flooding are the usual reasons for postponements; high winds are never cited as possible causes. A counter to this might be that the more gifted a team, the better it can handle such tricky situations. If you can't, you lose. Not that the conditions had any great influence on the final result, although it did confuse most players throughout and wasted large periods of time. The more coordinated, cohesive outfit - Lochs - triumphed in the end. Calm, controlled play on the ground always wins out, and this was epitomized by the outstanding performer tonight, Andy Murray, who popped up everywhere, creating oceans of personal space to orchestrate countless moves, and who simply could not be closed down by anyone in blue.

Against such confident opposition, na Gormaich never really looked happy. "D.I." and MacDonald do not gel quite as well as "D.I." and Mackay, and "Tiger" never really seemed certain in his role: when to come forward, when to stay back. This unsureness drew "D.I." right to cover, leaving MacDonald with a greater area to police, and this in turn drew Armstrong deep, allowing "Cage" to move forward. "Bubble" also was not as assertive as usual, fighting for space with Mackay and "Squegg", as Mackay and he both wish to perform the same role; be in charge of central midfield, directing forward movement, while "Squegg" digs in around them, then delivers the golden breakers or beautifully-flighted dead-balls.

Also, an ineffective "Bernera", pushed left, was clearly out of position. However, against an on-song Macmillan/John "Uig"/Murray midfield, it's difficult to imagine if any opposition midfield on the islands could prevail. And this of course left the irrepressible "Gochan" (who can thank "Bugsy" he remained on the field the whole 90 minutes) in the Ben Gunn position usually occupied by Neil Sinclair, infrequently supplied to use his pace and skill to good effect.

Carloway Man of the Match: Calum Masson.

Lochs Man of the Match: Andy Murray.