

Lewis and Harris League:

Stornoway United 0 (0) Carloway 0 (0)

*At Goathill Park, Stornoway.
Wednesday, 23.5.18. 19.00.*

*Referee: Calum "Chancey" Macleod.
United line judge: Iain Morrison.
Carloway line judge: Calum "Cobby" Macleod.*

CARLOWAY: 4-5-1.

*Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.
Asst. Managers: Domhnall Mackay; Iain Angus "Gus" Maciver.*

Gordon "Van der Sar" Craigie

*Callum "Beag" Mackay Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Archie MacDonald Joe Armstrong
Callum Masson Stuart "Bubble" Macdonald Neil Sinclair Murdo "Sguegg" Macleod (capt.) ■
Andy "Bernera" Morrison*

Kevin "Gochan" Macleod ■

Subs. used: Domhnall Mackay (Andy "Bernera" Morrison) 54; Calum "Killer" Mackay (Joe Armstrong) 77; Andrew "Lanky" Macdonald (Murdo "Sguegg" Macleod) 88.

Yellow cards: Kevin "Gochan" Macleod (foul play) 43; Murdo "Squegg" Maceod (unsporting behaviour) 46; Kevin "Gochan" Macleod (foul play) 90.

Red card: Kevin "Gochan" Macleod (receiving a second caution) 90.

UNITED: 4-4-2

Manager: Steven Munro.

Finlay Macsween Hamish MacDonald (capt.)

*Alfie Macmillan Scott Montgomery Kenny Macsween Calum Iain "Kalou" Macdonald
Andrew Macleod Kevin Flower Eoin MacPhee Coinneach Smith
Jack MacIennan*

Subs. : Jason Gilmartin (Kenny Macsween) 72; David Allan Macmillan (Scott Montgomery) 80.

Yellow cards: none.

Red cards: none.

A speedy return to Goathill for Carlway meant that our heroes had an immediate chance to improve on their lacklustre performance in the Jock Stein Cup exactly a week ago. The same result would do, of course. The end problem that night had been the lack of scoring opportunities created, hence shots on goal, though two pieces of impromptu individualism had eventually delivered against a troublesome, though unthreatening opponent.

Perhaps rattling in five against a luckless South End on Saturday might have lightened the mood in the Carlway dressing-room and would provide the inspiration to test Jack MacIennan more frequently. However, the omens were not propitious. Defensive stalwart, Donald "D.I." MacIennan, turned an ankle during Saturday's victory and was not risked, in the hope he might return to action on Friday at Barvas in the EaF Round 1 First leg, while a heavy cold led to the captain, Domhnall Mackay, opting to take a place on the bench, beside his brother, Calum "Killer" Mackay, Andrew "Lanky" Macdonald, and Andrew Macleod. Saturday's debutant,

Calum "Fluffy" Maclean, and goal-hero, Fraser "Frazmac" Macleod, were not available, but Archie MacDonald returned to a rejigged back-line beside Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur, who slotted into "D.I.'s" role in the centre. Callum "Beag" Mackay switched from left- to right-wing-back, allowing Joe Armstrong to resume his normal role on the left. One *galactico* replaced another up front, with Kevin "Gochan" Macleod taking up the front-man position, ostensibly to partner Neil Sinclair, although the latter generally played deeper than usual in a Hidegkuti role, dropping back slightly, more into the *trequartista* area.

Wednesday nights are obviously not the evenings of choice to watch football matches in Stornoway. Despite there not even being a hint of the slightly cold wind of the previous week and a beautiful setting sun casting a picturesque glow over the home of football, there were more people in the combined squads than spectators on the terracing. The shouts of encouragement (?) from player to player rang clearly round the neighbourhood, but, again, even though there was plenty of "*sweat, commitment, and industry*", there were precious few defence-shredding moves.

One immediate difference tonight from the previous game was United's approach to the contest. Whereas last week, either through pressure or tactics, they had tended to sink back and allow Carlaway to come at them, perhaps showing them a bit too much respect - they were the Champions, etc., etc. after all - tonight they were fully engaged, and the Blues rode their luck at times, mainly later in the game.

Carlaway immediately slotted in to their familiar La Liga-style, patiently employing their preferred vertical approach, before breaking forward at pace, but a lack of control or coordination, plus solid tackling and defending, denied the Blues any opportunity until the 18th minute. A Masson corner on the right was met by "Squegg" on the central edge of the United box, but his attempted first-time volley was mishit and rebounded back out towards the right. Masson retreated to swing the ball back in, but in the ensuing melée, Sinclair was blocked, then Mackay, and then the ball was booted downfield by MacPhee. However, a minute later, na Gormaich again came forward, and from the centre circle, "Squegg" delivered a beautiful Charlie Gallagher over Masson's marker to allow the winger to move sharply towards the right edge of the United box. His early right-foot strike came low across the advancing MacLennan but the big man got down perfectly to push it away across goal to his right, and again the ball was booted clear by MacPhee, before "Gochan" could get there.

In 26 minutes the Stornoway side's first chance materialized when the Finlay Macsween and brother Kenny one-two'd into the right of the Carlaway half before the latter played a perfect low breaker straight forward between Armstrong and MacDonald for "Kalou" to move in on "Van Der Sar". The keeper was out like a flash and the striker hurriedly stabbed the ball low to his left from 16 metres but it sped a metre outside Craigie's left-hand post.

In 34 minutes "Bubble" responded with a trademark break down the right touch-line from midway within his own half. Just inside the United half, his quick wall-pass connect with Callum "Beag" allowed him to reach 20 metres from the line before squaring in to Sinclair in the centre on the edge of the box. The striker's quick turn left gave him space from MacPhee, but his low left-foot strike was well-wide of

Maclennan's left-hand post. A period of United aggression concluded the first-half uncomfortably for the Blues. In 40 minutes a Macdonald corner from the United left cleared the central ruck but was reverse-headed back across goal by Finlay Macsween beyond the far post. The ball reached Kenny Macsween on the edge of the box, but his first-time volley was hooked high over Craigie's bar. Three minutes later "Tiger" was unable to control a bouncing ball on the edge of the box, towards the Carloway right, and Finlay Macsween burst through, but again "Van Der Sar" was alive to the danger and blocked away for a corner brilliantly, low to his right.

Half-time: Stornoway United 0 Carloway 0

Carloway had been unable, despite their early pressure, to create more than a few half-chances, which barely troubled Jack Maclennan. Unfortunately, as United had grown in confidence, their pace and directness had been decidedly troubling on either wing, and Hamish MacDonald's presence and running difficult to control. Danger signals were emerging for the visitors as the first half progressed. Immediately, United won a free-kick midway within the Blues' half, in the centre, but MacDonald's powerful right-footer, placed slightly to Craigie's left, posed the keeper no problems. Three minutes later "Bubble" won the ball on the edge of his own box and instantly dispatched an early ball forward to the breaking Sinclair. He made 22 metres from the United goal before slipping a neat diagonal rightwards for the charging Masson to run onto behind his marker but the pace of the ball carried it away from the winger and Maclennan was out smartly to gather.

In 56 minutes the closest scrape arrived yet for the visitors when a Macdonald free-kick, in a dangerous position on the edge of the box, towards the left, whacked against and through the wall. The rocketing ball took a nasty deflection to the left away from the covering Craigie, but Archie MacDonald happened, by luck or design. to be guarding the line inside the left-hand post and somehow managed to block the flying ball away.

In 62 minutes Carloway did have the chance to regain the initiative when "Squegg" sent a beautifully-flighted free-kick from the left corner of the United box diagonally across goal but Maclennan got there first to hold high, 12 metres out in the centre. Six minutes later Carloway experienced another let-off. A United break down the right saw Kenny Macsween freed by MacPhee to make midway within the Carloway half, before driving a low diagonal into the Blues' box. The ball eluded the scrum in the centre and reached Macmillan, on the left, 16 metres from goal. Craigie came out to block his fierce, low drive to his left, the ball breaking outwards towards the centre, but Montgomery, unhindered 16 metres from goal, managed to pull his low drive across the open goal and wide of Carloway's left-hand post.

Na Gormaich were in danger of slipping out of the contest as United had a final chance to wrap up an unexpected win in the 85th minute. A Masson/Callum "Beag" move down the right was intercepted by Montgomery, midway within his own half, on the left touch-line, and he immediately played the ball forward to Macdonald, on the left touch-line wide of "Tiger". The United captain moved off sharpish, cutting in eventually towards the near corner of the box, and unleashed a thumping low drive to the approaching Craigie's left. "Van Der Sar", 12 metres out from goal, blocked expertly, low to his left but couldn't hold the spinning ball, which whizzed off square

to his right. However, Finlay Macsween following up, had over-anticipated the path of the ball, and the loose ball flew across goal behind him.

Full-time: Stornoway United 0 (0) Carloway 2 (0)

An evening to forget, perhaps, or better - an evening to learn from, although it's difficult to articulate what the lessons to be learned might be. At the moment, rightly or wrongly, Carloway always seem to expect to defeat United and the danger is, of course, to treat them with less respect than, say, the likes of Lochs, Westside, and Point, an attitude similar to that once reserved for teams from the Southern isles. However, since the confrontations with South End (especially the away meetings) and the emergence of lochdar Saints, that arrogance has largely disappeared. Maybe it's time for a re-appraisal of the approach to United games. Or maybe there are deeper reasons for the unsatisfying displays against United: the inability to penetrate a concentrated defence; the lack of imagination and creativity necessary to effect this unpicking of the opposition defence, and the creation of goal-scoring opportunities. It may be that this was simply an off-night: ace goal-scorer, Calum Masson, was subdued; Neil Sinclair too deep; and "Gochan" wayward. Maybe this was a point gained, rather than two lost. Overall tonight, the chances favoured the Wasps, and they must be kicking themselves for passing up on the three or four excellent second-half chances they engineered, and which were largely denied them by the old maestro, Gordon Craigie.

Stornoway United Man of the Match: Hamish Macdonald.

Carloway Man of the Match: Gordon "Van Der Sar" Craigie.