

South End 3 Carloway 2. 09/05/09

Stuart Rankin,

HAC 1:

Southend 3 (1) Carloway 2 (1)

Shonnie Steele 20

Josie Campbell 48, 81

Billy Anderson 28

Gordon Tago 74

An air of crushing disappointment permeated the Carloway bus home yesterday as the squad ruminated over missed chances, unlucky calls, and generally what might have been. No visits to Culbokie or Fortrose this season. This gnawing feeling was heightened by the knowledge that the team, more or less, did everything right, yet still crashed out: chances came by the hatful in a second half their midfield directed, but two slip-ups at the back cost the Blues dearly, as Southend, who had hardly featured as an attacking force in that half, capitalised on good luck and indecision.

Alex Smith continued beside Andrew Tago (Domhnall not recovered from Monday' s thigh strain) and Darren Mackinnon returned on the left, but, generally, the team had a familiar look. However, na Gormaich started slowly - a 4-hour journey by minibus, ferry, and coach, after a 6 a.m. rise then straight on to the park not being the best preparation for a cup-tie, especially on a tight, bumpy ground against a big, physical side like Southend.

Carloway no sooner were moving well and spreading the ball around when a free kick on their left about 30 metres out was played to the back post and missed by everyone; Shonnie Steele controlled it beautifully at the edge of the 6 metre box and cut it low across Craigie. Kevin Gochan now moved up centrally to support Savo and pressure the Uibhistich more. Carloway got a deserved equalizer when a Gordon Tago corner on the right was nodded expertly into the roof of the net by Billy Anderson, who by now was reprising his driving first half performance at Col Uarach last Monday.

The Blues now had the upper hand, although Craigie had to fist clear under pressure on the half-hour when a cleared free kick was returned into a ruck. The main problem did not seem to be the opponents: Carloway' s strong running game and wide use of Gordon Tago and Gochan was constrained by a tiny pitch which demanded underhitting to fall right for forwards breaking. Southend know this, of course, and their central stopper had a wonderful day, hardly missing a single forward-launched pass. Also, their back men and midfield knew exactly how to pitch attacking lobs, Wimbledon-style, to make life difficult for our back four. Then the Blues had good and bad luck in 37 minutes when a high ball from the right found Gordon Tago unmarked on the left of the box; there was a strong suggestion of handball as he brought it down but Tago did not hesitate: he turned and thwacked a tremendous effort off the goalie' s right hand post. Did Steven Scott even see it?

Na Gormaich emerged to turn the screw in the second half but were immediately caught cold at the back: a speculative daisycutter from about 22

metres bounced up and was spilled by Craigie to his right; faced by two forwards on their own, he managed to block the the first forward' s attempt but the ball broke to the second, Josie Campbell, in a suspiciously offside position, who converted it. The referee awarded the goal then saw the offside flag. He waved it away, but then was "persuaded" by angry Carloway players to consult. A long discussion took place; the goal stood.

Tensions rose. Carloway penned Southend back and opportunities appeared. Not that Southend were out of it, Andrew Tago being booked early on for bringing down an attacker racing through on the left at the other end. Fortunately, Alex Smith was parallel with him. Kevin Gochan put a good chance past on the hour, then moments later Kenny Dokus shot over. On 68 minutes there was a huge melée in the Uist men' s box and next Dan Crossley was pulled up, extremely dubiously, for offside on the left in the penalty box. At last, the breakthrough came when, from a corner on the left, Gordon Tago forced the ball home in an overcrowded box which contained almost everyone on the park.

Moments later, as Carloway went for victory, which they believed they deserved, yet another stramash led to a goal-line clearance. Lady Fortune can be cruel though - especially in sport. On a rare foray down the field Southend won a corner. It was half-cleared to their left but whipped back in, slightly deflected across and towards goal but safe. Craigie moved easily to his left to scoop it up but before his hands closed on it, Josie Campbell got a foot to it and toed it in. It was all to do again. Full marks to the boys - they set about it. But there was no way back a second time, although the chances continued to come, with Kenny Beag especially unlucky when a beautiful cross from the right whizzed off the ground to him in front of goal at a perfect wrong height: under the chin, hence too low to head, too high to hit effectively.

What can be learnt from this? That the Fates are cruel to humanity? Carloway did enough, in every area except shooting, to win several matches here. No one misfired. In fact, there were many outstanding performances: Andrew Tago continues to be a towering presence at the back and Darren Mackinnon creditable as a fast attacking wing forward. Our midfield more or less ran the game, with Sqweg and Billy Anderson particularly effective, and Kevin Savo took a lot of punishment breaking into their back four. Billy Anderson was especially commanding, in the hour or so he was on the field, and would be my Carloway Man of the Match.

However, the team that scores the goals deserves to win. Well done, Southend, and good luck in the next round.