

Athletic 0 Carloway 4. 13/05/09

Stuart Rankin,

Jock Stein Cup Round 1:

Athletic 0 (0) Carloway 4 (2)

Kevin Savo 14

Kenny MacIennan 20, 68

Gordon Tago 70

After Saturday's disappointment in South Uist, the Blues returned to winning ways with a well-merited, if ultimately flattering, victory over an out-of-sorts Aths' side. There were minor changes, which did, however, significantly affect the course of the game: while Gordon Mackenzie replaced the absent Craigie in goal, Calum Moody slotted in beside Andrew Tago to give central defence much-needed stability; Kenny Dokus missed out with a knee strain so Kenny MacIennan came in to add extra pace and firepower up front, beside Savo.

It was a beautiful, cloudless Spring night at Goathill, marred slightly by a rising, icy south-easterly, but this did not seem to affect the play. Na Gormaich's attacking line-up established an early control in the first half hour, denying Aths movement and penetration, as Sqweg and Billy Anderson drove forward from midfield, whilst Andrew Tago kept close to dangerman, Scott Maciver, limiting him to only a handful of breaks forward.

Despite neat passing play from Carloway, the opening goal, when it did come, was simple: a hefted kick-out by Gordon Mackenzie travelled deep into the Aths' half where it was controlled beautifully by Kenny MacIennan, who then turned and split the back four for an onrushing Savo to slot the ball past the advancing Macritchie. Next, Kenny himself converted after Donnie Macphail impeded Gordon Tago on the left about 25 metres out. Billy Anderson flighted the ball in across goal, Kevin Gochan nodded the ball back and inwards, and Kenny Beag headed home under the bar à la Ravanelli. As the half progressed, however, Aths gained some cohesion and right on half-time had two wonderful chances. After a corner and scramble in the Carloway box, Mojo gathered the ball on the left of the box with his back to goal, fooled his marker exquisitely with a back turn, but lifted the ball about a metre over the bar. Then, in injury time, a screaming corner on the right was met by Scott Maciver under the bar but the pace and height were too difficult to control and his header flew wide.

For the first half of the second half, Athletic had their best spell and created, and missed, numerous openings: Scott Maciver passed up two good chances, over the bar, past the post. Mojo missed a couple, then totally mishit an inviting low cross from the right directly in front of goal; Donnie Macphail had a free-kick in a dangerous position charged down by a wall. Na Gormaich's midfield grip had slackened and the Athletic strikers were finding more room to manoeuvre, dropping off and away from their markers, allowing them time to turn and run.

Based on a law of averages, it seemed likely Aths would score, but when the goal came, it was at the other end. A mistake allowed Kenny Beag to win the

ball in the centre circle and he moved it fast right to Gochan who ran and crossed low. Kenny Beag, following through, gathered it about ten metres out, turned to his left, and his low, deflected shot completely wrong-footed Macritchie low to his left. Two minutes later, the ball broke from a corner to Gordon Tago just inside the box. He let the ball bounce high, then calmly thrashed a half-volley into the goalie's top-right corner.

Carloway were coasting now, letting Athletic come at them, but Aths' bad luck continued with Scott Maciver striking a post on 77 minutes after a melée in the Blues' box; five minutes later a beautiful right-foot curler from Mojo just crept high outside Carloway' s right-hand post at the last moment. In the final moments, Gordon Mackenzie saved brilliantly low-down with his left hand from Scott Maciver, then blocked him well again, twice, with Pongo' s help, in the dying seconds.

No doubt, this was a cracking victory for the Blues, a testament to dogged marking at the back, and exemplary chance-taking up front. Andrew Tago was outstanding as usual, against the top striker on the island, and was ably supported by dependable backs, and the strong and stable Calum Moody beside him. Sqweg and Billy Anderson were commanding in the first half but faded a little afterwards, no doubt due to the driving effort they put in throughout the first half, but my Carloway Man of the Match would be Kenny Maclennan, whose doggedness in forward midfield, presence on the ball, and, above all, chance-taking, was the main difference between what happened here tonight and what happened last Saturday (not forgetting Calum Moody' s contribution at the back).

Athletic would be best to forget the first 35 minutes, when they were totally unfocussed, especially in defence, and think of the chances they made in the next hour. Mojo was most likely their best man, slipping markers, good on the ball, roaming free into open space; unfortunately, like the oddly-muted Scott, when he did set himself up for a shot, the hair in his target-sights had not been calibrated accurately.