

Jock Stein Cup SF:

Carloway 2 (2) Back 1 (1)

Dan Crossley 31

David Maclean 10

Kenny MacIennan 38

At Cnoc a' Choilich

25.5.09

Gordon Craigie

Calum Mackay Calum Moody Kenny MacIennan DI MacIennan

Kevin Macleod Billy Anderson Alex Smith Murdo Sqweg Gordon Tago

Dan Crossley

Substitutes: Seumas Macleod (Murdo Sqweg 45)

Bookings: Seumas Macleod (88)

As entertaining and combative a game as I've ever seen at Cnoc a' Choilich, which illustrated starkly several footballing adages: "It was a game of two halves"; "If you don't take your chances, you'll pay later", etc. Back must be wondering how it all went wrong, knowing they should have had Carloway dead and buried within the first half-hour. However, wayward shooting, bad luck, and excellent goalkeeping allowed the Blues to claw their way back into the game and gain an edge in the second half, something which seemed unthinkable after 25 minutes.

Another beautiful but cold May evening saw a much-changed Carloway side come under instant pressure, despite giving the Bacachs an early shock. Gordon Craigie returned in goal, while Kenny Beag occupied the absent Pongo's spot; Alex Smith joined central midfield, and youngsters DI MacIennan and Dan Crossley started at left back and sole striker respectively. Immediately Gochan got away on the right and his perfect cross was met centrally, 16 metres out, by Gordon Tago, whose measured header looped over Ali Tosta and smacked the bar.

Back didn't falter and a half-hour of one-way traffic towards Craigie ensued. Michael Mackay was unstoppable on the right, repeatedly finding the byeline and supplying inviting cutbacks. He had a shot blocked, then was brought down by Calum Mackay, and the resulting free-kick was met by David Maclean and sent low and hard into Craigie's bottom left-hand corner. Na Gormaich' s midfield were struggling and the defence couldn't close down Mackay and Macphee. Back were rampant, but failed to capitalise: Macphee was blocked, then Craigie had a stunning triple save, from a shot and two follow-up rebounds; moments later, he blocked again, then Macphee was felled on the front of the box and the free-kick scrambled away; DI brought him down again - it seemed the only way Carloway were able to stop Mackay and Hector at this point - and David Maclean put a good chance well over.

Needs must when the devil drives. Peter Dokus bravely rejigged his foundering line-up: Kenny Beag moved forward to aid Dan Crossley; Murdo Sqweg dropped back, and Calum Mackay back and in, with Gochan dropping to right midfield to support. The next ten minutes turned the game on its head, with Gochan breaking on the right and forcing the ball across to Dan

Crossley who squeezed it home at Ali Tolsta's bottom left. Michael Mackay should have restored Back's lead, shooting over, before a Billy Anderson free-kick was blocked by the keeper but swung back over him and on to the bar. Then a Tago corner on Carloway's right was cut back to Murdo Sqweg, who drove it in, and Kenny Beag helped it on its way with a high flick into the net. It was Back's turn to wobble and right on half-time a high Sqweg cross from the left was lost by the keeper, who palmed it on to the bar and over.

After the whirlwind opening half, a more even second half developed, with fewer clear chances for either side. There was more fine tuning: Kenny Beag dropped back for Sqweg, with Alex Smith and Billy Anderson covering Calum Moody, and Seumas Macleod came on to back the tireless Crossley. A towering performance from na Gormaich's defence gradually nullified the pace and movement of the Back midfield/attack. A goal-line clearance denied Gochan, then a minute later, Gordon Tago -of all people- cleared off Carloway's goal-line. Craigie saved well low to his right, before dealing with a total mishit which almost crept in wide to his left. Carloway thought they had clinched it on 78 minutes but were ruled off-side, but even with five extra frenetic minutes added, Back couldn't rediscover their incisive penetration of the first thirty.

Like the 5-4 game, this was a remarkable clash of styles, with the Blues' dogged commitment and continual ability to change and hold their shape eventually getting to grips with a side with greater technical efficiency and ability to spread and operate at speed. Michael Mackay and Hector Macphee were outstanding in the opening period -my joint Men of the Match- but wasteful, and brought the best out of Gordon Craigie, who was in Van Der Sar form and clearly my Carloway Man of the Match, though it really was an "All hands on deck" performance from the Blues and every one of them answered the call.