

Moldova Lewis Cup Final:

Back 5 Carloway 2 (after extra time. 2-2 after 90 mins.)

Kevin Bloxy 45+1, 60 Gordon Tago 19, 25

Martin Maclean 96

Michael Mackay 107

Chris Adams 114

At Garrabost

4.9.09

Ref.: DJ Maclean

Man of the Match Award: Ross Hall.

Gordon Craigie

Darren Mackinnon Calum Moody (34 ?) Domhnall Mackay(117 ?) DI MacIannan

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Alex Smith Kenny MacIannan(capt.) Gordon "Tago"

Macdonald

Seamus Macleod Ross Bremner

Subs used: Kevin "Gochan" Macleod (Ross Bremner) 56; Andrew "Tago" Maciver (Kenny MacIannan) 67; Billy Anderson (Alec Smith) 100.

It's hard to decide which type of defeat tastes more bitter: a narrow loss or an absolute thrashing. For the Blues, this evening had a bit of both, in a final which they must feel they should have had wrapped up after 35 minutes. In a sense, this was a mirror image of their own victory at Cnoc a'Choilich over the Bacachs in the Jock Stein Cup, which was described as illustrating "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".

Switch "Back" and "Carloway/ Blues"; it's not an exact opposite, but the similarities are there. After his head injury at Ness, Andrew Tago wasn't risked and started on the bench, alongside a still not 100% Gochan; Billy Anderson dropped out of midfield to allow Ross Bremner to start up front. Tohan was unavailable for Back but Andy Thompson didn't start, although Kevin Bloxy was fit to join Michael Mackay in attack.

A huge crowd on a pleasant evening saw Carloway start in a rush and immediately throw Back off balance, as if they intended to end their 54-year wait for silverware in the opening ten minutes. A pass-back put the Back keeper in immediate trouble and his attempted clearance rebounded off an attacker and past. Then on 4 minutes a glorious Gordon Tago cross left Alex Smith running free in front of goal but from 8 metres out, he headed weakly past. A Calum Tom shot from 35 metres tested the keeper low to his right, before a beautiful Smith-Macleod-Tago move saw Tago shoot just past. Then a corner on the right from the same player was cleared back to him; he moved in and his next cross/shot deceived the keeper high to his right just under the bar.

A Michael Mackay break was blocked close in by Calum Tom; then Alex Smith burst free through the middle but his shot was parried on to the bar;

Tago, following up, bundled the ball home. Moments later a scramble in the Bacachs' box led to the keeper just managing to divert a poke forward with his knee on to the post and away. At this stage Back were reeling, but within the the space of ten minutes, the whole pattern of the contest seemed to turn on its head.

Dano switched Michael Mackay right, away from the vice-like grip of Domhnall Mackay, and he began to spread the Carloway defence; Bloxy now had space between and beyond Moody and Mackay to drift and run; the Blues' back four were now occupied and couldn't push forward as additional midfield. Kenny Beag was now Makalele and had to battle to hold. The Carloway midfield evaporated and the killer ball to Tago disappeared. Ross Hall started to hold the line and spread his trademark passes forward, and Martin Maclean appeared as an attacking force.

On 35 minutes a series of corners pressed Carloway, leading to a scramble which ended with Craigie saving well on his right and the spinning ball being booted off the line; then Bloxy shot over, but it was no surprise, deep in injury-time, when Bloxy broke free to convert a low Mackay cross from 8 metres.

The momentum remained with Back in the second half, although Carloway's back line stayed resilient. A stalemate developed. Gochan replaced Bremner early, but without midfield support, the Blues could not create chances. The chances came Back's - especially Bloxy's - way, and on the hour, a glorious ball from midfield saw him escape the offside trap to run in on goal and beat the helpless Craigie.

Moments later, the keeper saved bravely at the striker's feet. Andrew Tago replaced Kenny Beag but still they could not stem the flow. Craigie again saved well from Bloxy, then had to move smartly to block the rebound after a Mackay shot came back off the bar. Then, suddenly, Carloway appeared to gain a second wind and dominated the last fifteen minutes of normal time. A Mackinnon run and cross was almost deflected home, before Gochan seemed to have beaten the offside trap on 77 minutes to convert a cross from the left but was adjudged offside. Calum Tom headed a Gordon Tago corner over, before Tago himself headed over when well-placed. In the dying seconds, Tago again broke free but shot past.

In the early dusk, both sides had near things, before a sweeping cross from the right saw Maclean control the ball, and turn past his marker to convert from the left edge of the 6 metre box. Everyone seemed to know that was the Golden Goal, though the Blues now went for broke, pouring forward and opening up huge gaps for Chris Adams (on for Bloxy) and Mackay on the break. A massed Back defence simply had to block and boot the ball forward to their two remaining men up front. Thus, an Adams break down the right saw a low cut-back being met by an inrushing and unmarked Mackay, about ten metres out in front of goal. Then, Craigie had to come rushing out to clear a long ball on the right but Adams intercepted the attempted clearance, stayed calm, and curled the ball round a despairing defender from about 20 metres.

Well, it all ended in tears for na Gormaich and the long wait goes on. Like all games, control of midfield is essential for victory. When Back came through the middle, Calum Tom and Domhnall coped admirably, allowing the wing-backs to surge and Calum himself to be creative. Gordon Tago didn't need to drop back, as DI moved up to support, and so he ran the Back right ragged, contributing repeated early crosses, and always being "around".

A match-winning switch from the Back bench stretched the Blues' defence wide, keeping them busy, including DI, and Tago had to become a midfielder. Ross Hall was no longer swamped and could look forward; Kenny Beag suddenly had too much to do, and losing him with a pulled muscle didn't help. Bloxy, my Player of the Match (closely followed by Michael Mackay and Martin Maclean), could now see Craigie clearly in front of him.

For Carloway, Gordon Tago had a 5-star 35 minutes but, of course, he can only create problems for the opposition if he gets the ball and gets forward. Macleod and Bremner ran themselves into the ground as expected. As usual, Craigie and the back four, with Kenny Beag, can't be faulted for effort and commitment. However, as in the League defeat at Leurbost, there is a limit to what they can sustain and achieve, if nothing is happening in front of them, though they did get forward as much as they could to prop up the midfield, with Darren Mackinnon (my Carloway Man of the Match) prominent in this role throughout. But my real Man of the Match is Dano, for his percipient awareness of the game's ebb and flow, and his deft switch in formation to turn the game Back's way.