

Highland Amateur Cup Round 3:

Golspie Stafford 5 (4) Carloway 3 (1)

Darren Pullen 23

Arran Smith 32, 42

Neil Stewart 45+1

Daniel Stewart 90+1

Calum Moody 43

Andrew Maciver 70

Archie Macdonald 72

At Culbokie.

Saturday, 19.6.10, 12.30 p.m.

Ref.: G. Dearie.

Gordon Craigie

Calum Moody Andrew Maciver (capt.) Darren Mackinnon

Dan Crossley Kevin 'Gochan' Macleod Donnie Macphail Seumas Macleod Gordon

'Tago' Macdonald

Kenny'Beag' MacIennan Kenny 'Dokus' Macdonald

Subs.used: Benn Esslemont (Kevin Gochan) 33; Archie Macdonald (Kenny Dokus) 56; Murdo 'Sqegg' Macleod (Gordon Tago) 61.

Yellow cards: Archie Macdonald 80; Benn Esslemont 83; Andrew Tago 88.

Peter Dokus's *Sturmbanntruppen* descended upon the Black Isle, in quest of a final spot at Victoria Park, Dingwall, in September, but, despite a mini-*blitzkrieg* in the second half, the Blues ultimately failed to rescue themselves from a nightmare 23-minute spell in the first. Nagging injuries and ill-timed holidays (Domhnall Mackay and Ed Ansell - some people!!!) necessitated change: Darren Mackinnon once more retreated to the back three, Dokus and Kenny Beag reprised their sometime strike partnership, while Dan Crossley dropped back wide to right midfield, although in the latter part of the first half, he had to perform more like a right back, but revealed a new versatility, under pressure - watch out Ed, DI, and Calum Tom!

On a sparklingly clear summer's day, in an exquisite setting high above the Cromarty Firth, Carloway kicked off into a fair nor'easterly against a spirited Golspie side, who edged the opening exchanges and created incisive early chances: right away, Daniel Stewart, an elusive handful centrally, was blanked by a saving Pongo tackle; on 14 minutes a dangerous free-kick from the left ran through a packed Carloway box; a minute later Shane Sutherland shot over when he should have hit the target, at least.

Na Gormaich were being hustled out of any rhythm and surrendering territory and possession too easily. A hard, physical battle in midfield was inexorably being lost, hence few opportunities were appearing up front, while attempts by the back line to reinforce the mid-line were allowing the Stafford attack to slip off into open space and surge. Thankfully for na Gormaich, they were wasteful but finally, the opener arrived on 23 minutes: a corner on the right was helped on and fell neatly for Darren Pullen on the left of goal, about 8 metres out, to give the men in light blue a deserved lead.

On 29 minutes a chance eventually came the Blues' way: a long diagonal cross from Pongo on the right, just inside the Golspie half, eluded the right back, but Tago's perfectly hit shot from the edge of the box flashed past

Macrae's left-hand post. Then the darkness really descended: Craigie rushed out to gather a high through ball, saw at the last minute he'd come too far, but as it bounced over his head, was unable to get back to stop Arran Smith turning it in. On 39 minutes Seumas Macleod robbed a defender on the left and shot just over before another high ball cleared the Carloway defence for Smith, in a suspiciously "offside" position, to round Craigie and convert.

Storming Calum Moody appeared to have given na Gormaich a lifeline just before half-time with another crashing trademark header from an Esslemont corner on the right but just as referee Dearie was reaching for his whistle another Golspie corner on the right broke loose on the left and Neil Stewart, 12 metres out, had time to turn and stroke it low through a ruck of players into Craigie's bottom left-hand corner. Thank goodness for half-times!

For all their earlier lack of cohesion, Carloway were intent on exploiting pace up front and wide but had tended to over-ambition. The loss of Gochan's power and speed to injury after half an hour damaged width, increasing pressure on Crossley who, as usual, was dogged but lacked support, except when Moody provided Zanetti-type back-up, and denied Kenny Beag assistance up front, while Kenny Dokus and potential matchwinner, Gordon Tago, were uncharacteristically subdued.

Whatever Peter Dokus put in the half-time tea certainly worked as Carloway burst out of the starting blocks in the second half, making up for what they lacked in creativity with "*up, boys, and 'at them!*" endeavour. Total football seemed to be the order of the half, with considerable positional changing. At first this wrongfooted the men in light blue and chances went begging: immediately Macleod shot past the left-hand post from 22 metres; on 52 minutes the same player headed just wide from a long free-kick from the right. Dokus is more Hiddink than Ranieri: no meddling for meddling's sake; rather, if it, or he, isn't succeeding, the guillotine drops mercilessly, and tout de suite. Squegg and Archie replaced Tago and Kenny Dokus.

Not that Stafford were idle spectators at this point: Craigie had to move smartly to block on 50 minutes. Then Sutherland robbed Calum Tom on the hour but failed to finish. However, on 65 minutes a corner on the right broke to Kenny Beag who laid it back to Squegg but his shot from 20 metres was fired straight at the keeper. Suddenly, with 20 minutes to go, Round 4 became a possibility: a corner on the right was headed on to the bar by Pongo; as the defence hesitated, Pongo was first to react and stabbed home from 8 metres. Moments later, the same player sent a beautiful hard ball through the centre where Macdonald's pace sent him free to crack an unstoppable low right-foot drive past Gordon Macrae from 18 metres.

As the Blues pressured, Golspie came back to life, and for the last 15 metres we experienced a scintillating, tense cup-tie, with all to play for, yet, even as the Blues forced it, they were unable to create any more opportunities and left yawning gaps at the back, where the best chances now fell to muinntir Ghoillspidh. On 78 minutes a goalbound Golspie strike was blocked by their own man; Shane Sutherland shot over on 84 minutes, then broke clear on 89

but dragged his shot wide on the right. On the whistle, Golspie broke again, and though Craigie made a marvellous stop to his right from the initial strike, Daniel Stewart converted via the far post despite Craigie, miraculously, getting a foot to it.

Engrossing, fluctuating entertainment. West Side have to be careful; the men from the shadow of Ben Bhraggie have some very tricky personnel - the Stewarts, Shane Sutherland, Arran Smith (Murchadh and Colin George should be on high alert!), plus a more than competent defence, and a safe Macrae behind them, though the forwards passed up many chances. How they handle Graham and Clinton will be interesting.

A first-half slackness in defence and lack of fire-power cost Carloway dearly in this match, though there were sterling, in-your-face performances by Actionman Moody (my Man of the Match and a tower of strength in the second half), Darren Mackinnon, Dan Crossley, Kenny Maclennan, and Seumas Macleod. Archie Macdonald was also the classic Denis Law-predator when he was called. The absence of Domhnall Mackay and loss of Gochan and Tago must have had an effect also. If anything, this game demonstrated that a lack of concentration, even for 20 minutes, can see another year pass without silverware.