

Coop Cup Round 2:

Point 0 (0) Carloway 0 (0) Carloway win 4-3 on penalties.

At Garrabost

Ref.: Calum Macleod

14.7.10

Gordon Mackenzie

*Andrew 'Tago' Maciver Calum Moody (capt.) Domhnall Mackay Donald DI MacIennan
Murdo 'Squegg' Macleod Kenny 'Beag' MacIennan Benn Esslemont
Kevin 'Gochan' Macleod Seumas Macleod Gordon 'Tago' Macdonald*

Subs. used: Ed Ansell (Benn Esslemont) 77; Kenny 'Dokus' Macdonald (Seumas Macleod) 84.

Yellow Card: Murdo 'Squeg' Macleod 79.

At Garrabost tonight, the real winner was the wind: the challenge was to harness it and join Back, West Side, and Eriskay/ Ness in the Coop Cup semis. Unfortunately, neither the Rudhachs or na Gormaich really achieved this, and, indeed, both looked happier playing against the wind, than with it.

Carloway welcomed the return of their iconic captain, Andrew 'Tago' Maciver, though Peter Dokus fulfilled his promise, "*I will be true to you*", Calum and Gordie, "*in my fashion*", by passing the captaincy to Calum Tom and preferring Gordie in goal to Craigie, in recognition of their roles in the astonishing Round 1 penalties-victory over eternal favourites, Lochs. Gordie Mackenzie returned the favour with a cup-affirming display, especially in the penalty shoot-out, but Ed Ansell, so influential at the back and in midfield against Harris, was unlucky to drop to the bench to make way for Andrew Tago, though he played a pivotal holding role later as substitute.

A howling wet nor'easterly drove the Blues like a force of nature towards Alex Wright and an early rush of corners, one sliced over his own bar by Alasdair Gillies, whizzed back and forth before him, without result. Carlway -and the wind- pinned Point in their own half as the Blues persisted, despite the conditions, on playing the ball, in Xavi-Alonso-Iniesta style, across the defence and wide midfield, denying the Reds possession, while awaiting the constant shifting pattern of Gordon Tago, Gochan, and Seumas Macleod to throw up the opening up front. Few materialised, however, as the home team remained resolute, and played the right game, in their circumstances: Gillies and Iain MacIennan were unfazed, allowing playmaker Rab Maciver to pick out Kettings on the right, Calum Mackay in the centre, or the forward space wide left, as Pongo naturally drifted inwards to support Domhnall Mackay and snuff out the aggressive threat of Cally Mackay.

It was a relatively chance-free half: on 16 minutes Mackenzie had to look

smart and block a Point break, before Tago was blocked at the other end and Seumas Macleod headed the resultant corner from the left just over Wright's bar. On 23 minutes Stephen Kettings burst clear down the right but was finally crowded out for a corner, before two long-range efforts from the Blues required attention from Wright. On 35 minutes the Rudhachs exploited space on the left which Mackenzie managed to block well low. If anything, the half had demonstrated what Mourinho's Inter had shown us in the Champions League Final: 65% possession doesn't necessarily mean that you are going to win, or even score: Point, though hemmed in for long periods, had looked as likely to score as Carloway. And anyway, both keepers simply had to be careful, not inspired.

A wind-assisted Point opened positively, with three great opportunities: on 47 minutes a Gillies free-kick from the right halfway line was headflicked on and pushed round the bottom of his right-hand post brilliantly by Mackenzie, before a scything Pongo tackle, worthy of Andoni Goikoetxea, on the left side of the box, allowed Rab Maciver to whip in a nasty free-kick which the keeper had to double-fist over the bar.

On 57 minutes, it was the Blues' turn to add to the list of near-misses: a typical, brusque run by Gochan down the right led to a bullet-like cross low across the face of the goal which eluded Wright, but Tago had over-anticipated the cross and was inches inside it as it spun by off the outside of his right foot.

Regarding tactics, Peter Dokus rivals Sir Alex Ferguson: if it's not working, don't agonise; change it! And right NOW! misfire and you're watching the daisies from the substitutes' bench regardless of where you think you are in the pecking order. Seumas Macleod dropped back more right midfield and Gochan and Tago moved in to twin-strike, while the bustling presences of Kenny Beag and Esslemont thrust forward in support, centrally and on the left.

On 66 minutes a Macleod turn on the right and left foot shot from 20 metres was confidently held by the keeper, as Carloway managed to battle their way back into the contest. A mix-up in front of the Point goal on 72 minutes allowed Tago an opening but pressure prevented him keeping it down, before Dokus tweaked the calibrator once more, the ubiquitous Ansell for Esslemont. Gochan immediately stormed through the centre but Wright was quick to block; then Calum Moody could not get the direction right on his header in a crowded box from an exquisite Squeg free-kick from deep on the right.

However, the Rubhachs were by no means out of it and had two late chances to sucker the Blues: on 85 minutes, another long free-kick from the halfway line by Gillies skidded though a mass of bodies and bounced up awkwardly to be parried by Mackenzie, but luckily for na Gormaich, the attempted conversion from the rebound, 6 metres out, practically hit Skylab overhead.

Two minutes later, as tempers continued to rise on both sides, a contentious free-kick on the edge of the box centrally, for a disputed foul on Kettings, led to a beautifully-flighted strike from Cally just clearing the bar.

It was a hotly-contested cup-tie and Calum Macleod showed extreme patience, especially in the second half, when a number of players had a lot of advice (!) to share. The inclement weather precluded extensive goalmouth incident; why is it that games are regularly postponed because of ice, snow, and flooding, but never the wind? The gale massively influenced this game, perhaps even the outcome. Point played neatly against it in the first half, with outstanding defensive performances from Gillies and MacIennan and careful central control from Maciver, and had a good opening and ending to the second, with Kettings and Mackay substantial, uncrushable presences on the right and in the centre.

Carloway competed well, though the flair of Monday versus Ness was missing. Their approach in the first half might be questioned but this is now their style: Pongo, Domhnall, and Calum Tom desire the measured approach, with Ed Ansell and DI wide right and left, and the combative Kenny Beag and Sgueg or Donnie Macphail awaiting the supply, while Benn Esslemont moves up the left and Seumas, Tago, and Gochan continuously employ the totaalvoetbal style to re-invent the attack wide and up front. Seumas, especially, is due the proverbial hatful.

The Coop Cup format meant that the tie went straight to penalties and Carloway successfully converted all four of their spot kicks, taken by Murdo 'Squegg', Kenny 'Dokus', Domhnall Mackay and Calum Tom Moody. The match-winning performance came between the sticks from Gordie, with several excellent blocks, a low save to the right, a fist-over, and two expertly-judged penalty stops which delivered victory, though it remains a dreadful way to separate such closely-matched opponents who suffered so much to entertain a sparse crowd.

Point Man of the Match: Stephen Kettings.

Carloway Man of the Match: Gordon Mackenzie.