

Lewis Cup Round 2:

Carloway 1 (0) Athletic 7 (2)

Calum Moody 54

Ross Macrae 16

Murdo 'Mojo' Maclean 29

Ali Walker 51, 60

Scott Maciver 56, 64

Graeme Macleod 87

At Cnoc a'Choilich.

6.8.10

Ref.: Murdo Macaulay

Gordon Craigie

Graeme 'Windy' Miller Andrew 'Tago' Maciver (capt.) Domhnall Mackay Andrew 'VP' Macleod

Ed Ansell Murdo 'Squeg' Macleod Dan Crossley Gordon 'Tago' Macdonald

Archie Macdonald Calum Moody

Subs.used: Donnie Macphail (Andrew VP Macleod) 45; Kevin Anderson (Gordon 'Tago' Macdonald) 74; Calum Fraser (Murdo 'Squeg' Macleod) 86.

How many forms can a nightmare take? Carloway's experience tonight must have covered quite a few, as their performance provided the perfect antithesis to the old show-business adage, "It'll be alright on the night!" Personal circumstances certainly militated against the Blues and necessitated major changes in tactics and approach but it still makes it difficult to understand how and why na Gormaich progressively fell to pieces before a focussed, alert Aths team who competed hard for every ball, moved relentlessly into open space, and consistently found the feet of forward runners.

Absentees included Kenny Maclennan (work), Kenny Dokus (off island), Darren Mackinnon, Benn Esslemont, and Kevin Macleod, while injured were Seumas Macleod and DI Maclennan, the latter sidelined for the rest of the season. This allowed an astonishing return for Graeme Miller at right-back, with Andrew VP coming in on the left, while Ed Ansell started at right midfield; Dan Crossley continued in a central role, while Calum Moody moved forward to partner Archie Macdonald up front.

On 4 minutes Mojo had the first opportunity: a half-chance from ten metres which Craigie beat away to his right for a corner. An inconclusive opening 15 minutes witnessed only one Carloway attempt on goal, a long shot from Andrew VP, well wide. At first the Blues seemed to be benefitting from Scott Maciver's withdrawn role as central midfield provider, a la Wesley Sneijder, rather than his usual nomad-style predator further forward, leaving that approach to fellow hit-man, Ali Walker, and the tireless running of Mojo, a constant irritant to the Blues at the left of the attack.

Aths came good in the 16th minute: the Blues appeared to have cleared a corner on the right and broke sharply, then gave the ball away 25 metres out: it was whipped back in high over the outcoming defence to the left. It appeared to be flying past but Mojo gave chase behind and somehow managed to hook the ball high on the volley back across goal, where Ross Macrae had time to admire the Oakleys' garden before casually crashing home from 8 metres.

By mid-half Carloway were clearly misfiring: with Maciver withdrawn but attacking, essentially a centre-forward playing in central midfield, in true 60s' Iron Curtain-style, while Walker roamed and Mojo drifted between and behind Windy and Pongo, the back-line were uncertain: who should mark which front runner? Should they advance to negate the playmaker, who they thought was going to be the front-runner? Likewise, the midfield were drawn narrow and became potential ballwinners, not creators.

Uncertainty reigned there too: was it Crossley's job to combat Maciver, or Sqwegg's? Tago was drawn back into midfield, inwards, while Ansell continually had to retreat to help Windy deal with Mojo. Nothing came forward, causing Calum Tom in turn to drift back into right midfield and Archie Uibhisteach to become isolated, without a single ball to his feet in the first half. On 25 minutes Mojo narrowly missed; then Maciver set up Ali Walker but he miscued, before Mojo, once more, lost his marker to run on to a high through ball. Craigie blocked magnificently; unfortunately, the ball came back off him, hit Mojo, and trickled home just inside the far left-hand post.

Desperate times? Desperate measures? To prime the spark plug, Peter Dokus opted for a three-man back-line, and reinforced midfield with VP sacrificed for Macphail. Unfortunately, a right-leaning midfielder for a left-back strengthened one area but weakened another. Aths struck again before it could be judged effective: another attempt to play the ball out of defence, to dictate the pace, led to Maciver winning it 25 metres out; he moved in and squared it to Walker 16 metres out on his left, unmarked, and he swept the ball home effortlessly.

A sense of this shouldn't really be happening drove the Blues forward for a brief flurry: Donnie Macphail had a beautiful drive from 20 metres tipped over before a break on the left led to a trademark Calum Moody header from a Tago cross clawing one back. Then reality took over as a hat-trick of Hoops' goals arrived: first, Pongo miscued a clearance wide left 25 metres out, the ball spun back into the centre over the covering Miller's head right to the feet of - who else? He, in turn, carried it in, drew Craigie, then sidestepped him left, and converted.

Carloway were now disintegrating: On 64 minutes a header off a corner on the left was booted off the line, before Ali Walker, presented with a free-kick opportunity 20 metres on the left of the box, sent an exquisitely-flighted ball

over the wall into Craigie's top left-hand corner. Beckham couldn't have done better! When a loose ball broke to Maciver two minutes later, 20 metres out, he had time to control it, check his mobile, then fire it low to Craigie's right. It seemed na Gormaich's misery could not be deeper. Yet, with four minutes left, a high diagonal cross from the halfway line left seemed to be whizzing past before Graeme Macleod, ghosting in on the right, got the slightest of touches to divert it home.

Athletic were probably stunned by the ease of victory, as, simply by performing competently and doing the straightforward things correctly: maintaining position; moving off markers; not dwelling on the ball; laying it off as quickly as possible, and so on, they might have surpassed England's treatment of Pakistan in the First Test. Gus Maciver could have fitted in an extra shift at Tesco's for all the pressure he was under.

How should Carloway view tonight's debacle? Examine what clearly didn't work and learn what to do, or totally forget the whole unfortunate experience? A mixture of both would probably be most instructive: for example, strikers of Scott Maciver's and Ali Walker's calibre cannot be allowed to roam unchecked; even Mojo, on this form, has to be marked out.

Sometimes trying to play the ball out of defence is not the best option under pressure; it requires extreme care and accuracy. A functioning midfield is essential for success; quality footballers like Archie Uibhistich and Gordon Tago need a supply of balls in front of them at their feet to be effective. And so on. None of this is rocket science; another night it all might gel. Perhaps, tonight can simply be written off as a blip that all teams - except Lochs, of course - suffer from time to time.

Athletic Man of the Match: Scott Maciver.
Carloway Man of the Match: Dan Crossley.