

Coop Cup Final:

Carloway 1 (0) West Side 3 (1)

Calum Moody 77

Colin Morrison 31

D.J.Clinton 65

John Campbell 73

At Goathill Park

Ref.: Calum 'Chancy' Macleod

21.8.10

Gordon Craigie

Andrew 'Tago' Maciver Calum Moody (capt.) Domhnall Mackay Benn Esslemont

Donnie Macphail Kenny 'Beag' MacIennan Murdo 'Squegg' Macleod Gordon 'Tago'

Macdonald

Kevin 'Gochan' Macleod Archie Macdonald

Subs. used: Dan Crossley (Archie Macdonald) 55; Seumas Macleod (Kevin Macleod) 55.

Yellow Card: Domhnall Mackay 37

What distinguishes a Federer from an Andy Murray? A Nadal from a Davychenko? Competitors of apparent equal merit, yet some of whom seem to be serial winners, while others, though always close, never quite win the big one? Revie's Leeds United appeared like that in the 60s-70s too, eternal runners-up, losing finalists, etc., which led Jack Charlton to complain once that he could not endure much more of such misery.

After an epic journey to Goathill, which has seemed, at times, as long as Mao's Great March, through tense and exciting penalty shoot-out victories against Lochs and Point and a grinding win over a dogged Ness, the Blues opened their fifth final in four years, aspiring to greater fortune than that experienced by Charlton, having lost 0-4 and 1-4 to Lochs in the Jock Stein and Lewis Cup Finals in 2007, again in the Jock Stein to the men of Leurpost 0-7 last year, before the gut-wrenching extra-time reverse, 2-5, to Back in the Moldova Lewis last September. There were four non-starters for na Gormaich: Donald MacIennan (tendon), Kenny Macdonald (broken wrist), Darren Mackinnon (work), and Ed Ansell (calf strain), but Peter Dokus's problems seemed happy ones for a change: who to leave out, not call up.

Andrew Maciver was available, so Graeme Miller, who had got up to speed against Aths, then performed so admirably versus Harris and Ness, dropped to the bench, but, up front, which two of four to start? Archie Macdonald and Kevin Macleod got the nod, with Seumas Macleod and Dan Crossley joining Miller, Gordie Mackenzie, and Andrew 'VP' Macleod as substitutes. Calum Moody was risked, despite carrying a small strain. As expected, West missed Dan Macphail, off on a belated honeymoon (some guys have their priorities all wrong!).

Cup Finals are dangerous beasts: no team, no matter how favoured, wants to be rash, give away the early advantage, then have a mountain to climb. It was a cagey, formless opening, as both sides seemed terrified of each other, and struggled to establish a rhythm. Two minutes in, a long ball out of West's defence was allowed to run through the Blues' back-line and Craigie had to move smartly to fist clear; then a Morrison free-kick from 20 metres hit the wall after Graham had been hacked down from behind, and flew away left.

The Blues seemed dangerously loose at the back, with Clinton dropping back to run or spread, Ali Macleod drifting back and forward on the right, with Esslemont, desperate to push forward, finding him awkward to handle, and Scott Graham floating in the middle.

Eventually, aggression, a strategy by no means unused by the Blues or unusual in these derbies, gave Carloway some momentum, and the back four slammed forward to bolster a midfield locked in unarmed combat with Colin George et al, freeing Macphail right and Tago left of defensive duties. As usual, the way round was the right way, not the straight way into the wall. Two Donnie Macphail corners on the left were, in turn, cleared out, then headed over. On 12 minutes Gochan got in behind the defence to score but was marginally offside, before West hit back from a free-kick 24 metres out to the left, the closest chance yet, but slightly too high to Craigie's left.

Then, suddenly, on 31 minutes, a game-changer: a Duncan Maclean corner on the right was met by the head of a totally unmarked Colin George, directly in front of goal, 8 metres out, giving Craigie no chance. The game ratcheted up; the tackles went in. Carloway maintained possession and territory, but the chances came to West: a stunning Craigie fingertip save, low to his right from another dangerous free-kick, kept the Blues alive. A final flurry from the Blues saw Moody heading a beautifully-flighted Tago free-kick just over from 10 metres, before a crushing diagonal right from Archie Uibhisteach set up Macphail for the Blues' best, and only clear-cut, chance of the half; he struck the ball perfectly and low but pulled it just wide of Kennedy's right-hand post from the right corner of the box.

Na Gormaich's approach soon demonstrated a feeling that the game was drifting away from them in face of a comfortable-looking West who seemed happy to let the Blues come at them, parry this, play round them, and release Clinton and Graham on lethal fast breaks. Immediately, Mackay freed Pongo down the right, but his cross was overhit; then Sqwegg fired past from 22 metres. Desperate times need desperate measures and Dokus bravely bit the bullet: the struggling Uibhisteach and Gochan off; Seumas Macleod and Crossley on.

Immediately a Macleod cracker, wide left nearly 30 metres out, surprised Kennedy but he recovered brilliantly to tip the ball on to the bar; on 63 minutes Macleod was unable to get weight behind his attempt from 8 metres, off a low cross from the left. Then the game effectively ended: a moment of indecision by Sqwegg saw him mishit a short pass back to Pongo wide on Carloway's right, just inside their own half; the ball was whipped forward past Moody centrally to Clinton ghosting in behind, and he finished high to Craigie's right, running in from the edge of the box. A clinically executed winner!

Kennedy almost handed Carloway a lifeline two minutes later when he mysteriously palmed an attempted clearance off a corner on the left over his own bar. Pongo was then released by a Kenny Beag through ball but Kennedy managed to block. Every Blue was now a potential attacker and the resulting loss of shape led to West's third: a corner on their right was cleared, fired back in, and an unmarked Campbell, 8 metres out, to the right of goal, nodded home expertly. Even though, four minutes later, Moody converted

high, 12 metres out, from a Macphail corner on the left, the Cuach a' Choop was already in the Royal Mail van heading towards Barvas, despite a couple of near things: on 81 minutes, Kennedy inexplicably dropped another corner but the ball was deflected past, though he redeemed himself with an excellent parry after Macphail had opened the defence for Crossley. With five minutes remaining, a ball from the left allowed Macleod to turn and slip the ball past the keeper from 12 metres centrally, but, as the ball trickled slowly towards goal, it was booted away by Donnie Smith (?).

Ezekiel believed there is a time for everything under heaven. Clearly, this was not Carloway's time. When it will be, if ever, only the God of Ezekiel might know. This game demonstrated the Mourinho maxim starkly: running, possession, territory are zilch, without firepower. For 70 minutes Gordon Kennedy checked his Facebook Inbox between catching overhit crossballs, while Carloway huffed and puffed, and West Side combatted, but played around and over them.

Carloway had the majority of the play; West Side most chances, though, overall, this final had astonishingly few. When the call came, no one in the Barvas team was posted missing, with outstanding performances from Wallace, Williamson, Donnie Smith, and Colin George; DJ, who had to spend large amounts of time simply being a pain in Carloway's posterior, did not hesitate when the ball fell kindly for him and did exactly what he was asked to attend Goathill for. No one in the Carloway side can be criticised for individual performance or application; it was simply style, or tactical approach, that malfunctioned. The nature of the game made Carloway abandon lengthy build-up, to hurry things up, with the 40-metre diagonals from the back, which were constantly overhit. Neat passers/ controllers of the ball, like Macphail and Gordon Tago, strikers/ runners who need balls to feet facing the opposition goal like Gochan or Seumas or Dan, Macari-types like Archie, had to search for the ball, rather than receive it. High balls into West's penalty area were ineffective with no real headers of the ball around, except at dead-ball situations.

The unfortunate lesson from this game, from Carloway's point of view, was that for all their possession of ball and territory, and aggressive running, they simply did not look dangerous nor create it.

Congratulations, West Side.

West Side Man of the Match: Colin George Morrison.

Carloway Man of the Match: Donnie Macphail.