

ABC Cup Round 2:

Athletic 4 (2) Carloway 1 (0)

Scott Maciver 41, 44

Domhnall Mackay 64 (pen.)

Scott Macaulay 48

Robert Jones 65

At Goathill Park.

Monday, 18.4.10

Ref.: D.J. Maclean

Gordon Craigie

Andrew "Tago" Maciver Calum Tom Moody Domhnall Mackay Donald "D.I." Maclennan

Darren Mackinnon Seumas Macleod Donnie Macphail Murdo "Squeg" Macleod (capt.) Gordon "Tago" Macdonald

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald

Subs.: Kenny "Beag" Maclennan (Donnie Macphail) 46; Billy Anderson (Seumas Macleod) 46; Dan Crossley (Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald) 66.

And so to Goathill, the Blues' own personal "Field of Misery", an arena which has witnessed so many instantly forgettable experiences for na Gormaich supporters: Cup Final disappointments; thrashings by Lochs; a League mauling by United last season. Even last minute defeat in the same cup, in the same round, to the same team 364 days before, via a goal, incidentally, scored by that same recurrent bête noire from a collective Carloway nightmare, Scott Maciver, practically an inverse Blues mascot by now, and who was to return, yet again, tonight, to consign the Blues to ABC Cup oblivion.

The omens seemed propitious for what, on paper at least, promised to be an exciting early-season clash between the two form teams. Despite having Kenny "Beag" Maclennan available, Kevin Anderson opted to continue with the XI who started against Lochs, with Kenny "Beag" joining Archie Macdonald, Dan Crossley, and Billy Anderson on the bench, alongside ex-Harris stopper, David Beaton.

An opening stalemate soon established what was to be the continuing motif of the first-half, with Aths controlling the midfield forcibly and pushing the Blues back with regularity, occasionally laying the ball back for their trademark long ball to test the retreating pace of the Carloway back-line against Maciver and Jones. Domhnall Mackay was sticking closer than a Band Aid to his favourite striker, within an unusually muted Carloway outfit, who seemed content, by design or because of pressure, to block, then play the ball out and around/ through Athletic. Without success however, as the ball was being given away too cheaply, or incisive tackling and heavy marking precluded constructive forward movement. An isolated Kenny "Dokus" lacked ammunition, and was constantly closed down by a trio of defenders whenever he did receive the ball.

On 14 minutes Scott Maciver first eluded his marker on the right but Jones over-anticipated his cut-back from the bye-line and it passed behind him; a minute later an Aths corner led to a blocked shot rebounding in a crowded area to Maciver but his attempt was too measured from 12 metres and Craigie was untroubled. It was 25 minutes before na Gormaich really threatened: a free-kick on the right centre-line was brought down beautifully by "Dokus" on the left inside the box but his reflex

drive was smothered competently by Murdo Maciver. On 32 minutes Seumas Macleod forced his way into the box but force of numbers led to a hurried poke wide of the keeper which was hastily swept away; then, a minute later, "Tago" connected from a long ball from Pongo, but Aths' keeper Maciver had little trouble. Increasingly, however, the opener threatened at the other end: a smart Maciver reverse pass sent Jones through to convert but he had stepped a metre behind Moody too soon. Then a long ball found Maciver running clear but, challenged by Craigie, his outstretched foot could only touch it past him, and wide of the goal.

Eventually the inevitable arrived: on 41 minutes another long ball from the left found Mackay and Maciver wrestling their way into the box; about 12 metres out, in their duel for possession, Maciver managed to touch it away from the defender, and move on smartly to fire the ball over the advancing keeper's shoulder and high inside the right-hand post. The Carloway defence still seemed stunned three minutes later when an innocent-looking cross came in from the left bye-line and a stationary Maciver managed to nod it home unchallenged from the near side of the 6-metre box.

Desperate times need desperate measures: Kevin Anderson and Graeme Miller recalibrated swiftly at the interval to prime the stuttering engine and Kenny "Beag" and Billy Anderson were tasked with adding weight to an invisible midfield in a second-half charge. However, what-might-have-been rapidly became academic as, after a Calum Moody pile-driver just over the top from almost the central halfway-line, the Carloway defence were immediately to give away the sort of goal that wakes a player up in the middle of the night sweating. There seemed little danger when the ball was knocked carelessly forward into the Carloway area on the right. Craigie moved to pick it up, then Kenny "Beag" intervened but was caught; the ball rebounded back off the Aths player and seemed to be running past for a goal-kick. Craigie moved right to pick it up but the ever-predatory Maciver darted quickly to catch the abandoned ball right on the bye-line, then cut it back in past the stranded keeper to a solitary Macaulay in front of goal, 6 metres out, to bang home.

Understandably, it took the Blues a few minutes to come to terms with this disaster, but gradually they gathered momentum and for the first time, began to compete hard in the centre of the park. That Athletic had subconsciously relaxed is a possibility, although it is hard to imagine Gus Maciver et al soft-peddalling. However, chances suddenly started to appear for the Blues. On the hour a "Tago" corner was met by a Mackay header, but was scrambled away, close to the line; then 4 minutes later, Dame Fortune really smiled on the men from the West: a cross from the left was deflected outwards along the edge of the box where it bounced up sharply against Robert Macleod's upper arm. It was one of those who-you-support-decides-how-you-see-it offences. Macleod hardly meant it but, arguably, it did deny Carloway an advantage. An expert Domhnall Mackay conversion sent Maciver the wrong way.

Game on! Or so we thought. A minute later a rather innocuous through ball into the Carloway box led to several mishit attempts at clearances, before being pounced on by Craigie, who promptly dropped it, stretched to grab it a second time, failed, and Robert Jones thwacked it in from 6 metres. Effectively the game was now over but, Carloway still tried to confound the record books, coming forward in numbers, and as a consequence, Scott Maciver had two further opportunities to add to his total: on

67 minutes a low cross from the right left him unmarked, 12 metres out, in front of goal, but surprisingly, he only connected weakly; then five minutes later, yet another cross from the right allowed him to flick just over the bar from the same range.

Ironically, Carlaway had now their best period of the game, with several half-chances: a "Sqweg" free-kick from 25 metres out on the left was headed over by Moody; Crossley was blocked at the near post; and with 10 minutes left, Moody headed a corner from the left back across goal for Pongo to knock over. Two further headers off free-kicks were sent past by Mackay and Moody in turn, before deep in injury-time, a corner led to a scramble in the Aths' 6-metre box which sent the ball bouncing off the top of the Aths bar.

For most of the game it was difficult to believe these were the same players who ran the Champions so hard a week ago. Against Lochs, the defence was as tight as a drum; tonight the defence was the strongest part of the team for 40 minutes, thereafter as porous as a sponge. Yet the team faced the same sort of challenge on both occasions: two strong midfields backing up and supplying two aggressive sets of strikers. In the first half, apart from Darren Mackinnon, the midfield did not contribute against aggressive opponents anxious for the ball, who regularly seemed to run right through them; therefore the Pongo-Mackay-Moody back-line felt obliged to impel the team forward and this loosened the shackles on their most deadly adversary, and he accepted the gifts which came his way with many thanks, even passing on a few to young Jones. Yet although Athletic were heavily committed in midfield, in support of two free-running attackers, there always, without fail, seemed to be three at the back, even if it was just a single opponent to handle; Kenny "Dokus" simply had too much to do. The added presence of Kenny "Beag" and Billy Anderson did eventually stabilise the team in the second half, but before the team had time to regroup for a concerted fight-back, uncertainty at the back finished the contest.

Athletic Man of the Match: Scott Maciver.

Carlaway Man of the Match: Calum Tom Moody.