

Highland Amateur Cup Round 3:

Carloway 4 (1) Castletown 0 (0)

Calum Tom Moody 28

Dan Crossley 57

Murdo "Squeg" Macleod 58

Chris Macleod 77

At Fortrose,

Saturday, 18.6.11

Ref.: John Bicknell

Gordon Craigie

Darren Mackinnon Andrew "Tago" Maciver Calum Tom Moody Donald "D.I." MacIennan

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Donnie Macphail Dan Crossley Murdo "Squeg" Macleod

(capt.) Gordon "Tago" Macdonald

Kevin "Gochan" Macleod

Subs.: Archie Macdonald (Kevin "Gochan" Macleod) 10; Chris Macleod (Kenny "Dokus"

Macdonald) 74; Kevin "Barra" Macneil (Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald)75;

Yellow Cards: Gordon "Tago" Macdonald 26; Archie Macdonald 46.

Carloway arrived here on a second visit to Fortrose for HAC duty, though this was to be their first test on the new school pitch, having previously played on the nearby King George V pitch, in a picturesque, if exposed setting, on the Moray Firth. Their first visit here, in July 2008, against the same Caithness side, had been ground-breaking: the first season they had won two consecutive matches in the HAC; their first qualification for a third round tie against mainland clubs; and their first appearance in a HAC QF, after disposing of Southend, Athletic (**that game**, the one of the disputed final-minute winner!), and Halkirk. Unfortunately the fairy story was to end there, in a contest they had at one time led 2-0, had seemed to control, but, conceding a weak goal just before half-time, tumbled out of the Cup in extra-time. The men from Caithness subsequently went on to disappointment in the final against Pentland United, who happened to be the same team that, last year, ended the dream for Golspie Stafford, who had consigned the Blues to defeat at Culbokie, in another tie which left a gnawing feeling of an opportunity missed.

There were seven strong men remaining from that damp July day in 2008: Andrew "Tago" Maciver, Calum Tom Moody, Murdo "Squeg" Macleod, Chris Macleod, Kevin "Gochan" Macleod, Gordon "Tago" Macdonald, and Andrew "V.P." Macleod. However, the last year's Culbokie squad was here, excepting the unavailable Seumas Macleod, Kenny "Beag" MacIennan (work commitments), and Benn Esslemont (now with Harris); Domhnall Mackay was unavailable also. Castletown had a familiar look too, with last year's scorers: Graham Macdonald, Derrick Shearer, and Martin Murray in the side, together with that game's Man of the Match, David McGill.

It was damp and overcast, though not cold, as Castletown chose to enlist the support of the steady nor-easterly. The game didn't really open up till the 10th minute, when a nose injury saw the unfortunate departure of "Gochan", who, along with Stuart McKenzie, had seemed most promising of the attackers. Castletown were struggling to harness the wind's potential and the early

chances came to na Gormaich: on 12 minutes a gigantic free-kick by Calum Tom Moody from the centre circle saw Dan Crossley leap inside the left of the box to head on to Donnie Macphail but his right-foot stab from 16 metres shot just outside Stuart McCulloch's right-hand post. Minutes later a "Squeg" free-kick, 25 metres out on the right, was cross-headed by Moody across the defence and as the ball broke out, "Dokus's" snap right-foot drive was held low by the keeper.

On 25 minutes a first clear chance for the men from Olrig: a sublime flick by Gavin Henderson to his right found Greg McLoud freed on the overlap but his shot lacked power and Craigie got down sharpish to block, then drop on the rebound. However, the flow of the game remained with the Blues, mainly because of early, and what was to be continued, dominance by the midfield: "Squeg" was trawling, tackling, and driving through the empty ground in front of a defence, who in turn cleared decisively under pressure, and helped in the build-up, given time. Dan Crossley was playing to the Guardiola hymn sheet; you have a zone (in Dan's case, a VERY LARGE zone - all of the centre of the park!); if the ball comes in to it, it's YOUR responsibility!; with the ball at his feet, and allowed to accelerate, the Castletown defence had real difficulty handling him; while Donnie Macphail's killer touches, *a la* Xavi, were allowing "Dokus" and "Tago" golden chances to break wide to supply.

On 26 minutes a surge on the left saw the ball played on to a breaking "D.I.", and his vicious low cross from the bye-line was clutched expertly by McCulloch. Then came the breakthrough: when a "Tago" corner on the right came whizzing head-high across, 10 metres from goal, and was met by the head of Moody, running in from the left, along the defence, to smack home.

An immediate chance for retaliation saw McKenzie sent clear on the right but a brilliant recovery tackle by "Pongo", racing back to slide in on him as he shaped to shoot from 16 metres, averted disaster. It also served as a stark reminder about bolting cellar doors, etc. as Carloway went for the killer. On the half-hour a Mackinnon break on the right fed "Dokus", 20 metres out, but a busy McKenzie reacted well. On 37 minutes "Tago" fought his way down the left and wasted no time in supplying Archie Macdonald but his rasping drive from 22 metres was held safely by the keeper to his left.

Ian MacDonald's half-time team-talk, no doubt, advocated aggression, conscious that the Hoops were gradually being edged out of a game increasingly controlled by the Blues, who had allowed them only the above two real chances so far and a few snapshots from distance, the last on 39 minutes by Gavin Henderson from 22 metres which almost ended up in Lossiemouth. Precipitateness, mainly on the part of Martin Murray and Stuart McKenzie, had seen them over-anticipate repeatedly the passes of Henderson etc, behind a Carloway high back-line, and hence offside. Also, though they were nippy and occasionally troublesome, they lacked the pace and directness of a Fraser Macleod or D.J. Clinton.

A Castletown break on 56 minutes led to the chance that could have changed the game: a dangerous, inviting cross from the right eluded Carloway's big men, and Martin Murray ghosted in centrally, but from 8 metres out, headed straight into Craigie's arms. Within two minutes, the contest was effectively over, courtesy of two inspired goals from Carloway, one mainly individual, the

other featuring a move even the '74 Dutch masters would have been proud of. A Castletown attack broke down on the edge of the box and the ball sped swiftly forward centrally to Crossley who turned, did a brief one-two with "Squeg", surged further forward into the opposition half, shrugged past two tackles, and from fully 28 metres sent a screaming low right-footer low into McCulloch's right-hand corner. A stunner!

An immediate Castletown attack from the restart lost the ball and this time it was flashed onwards to a running Macdonald in the centre circle, who dispatched the ball to "Dokus" sprinting clear into the opposition half on the right; "Dokus", in turn, held the ball till exactly the right moment before pin-pointing "Squeg" bursting through the centre to take his inch-perfect pass to the edge of the box, check and let his chasing defender run past him, double back one step, then send an exquisite right-foot lob high over the advancing McCulloch and into the top far-left corner of the net. Even better!

The game ran down now, with Castletown still ineffective up front against a resolute Blues' defence and Carloway, whenever the ball was lost in the opposition half, to retreat in numbers, to ensure there was no way back for the men from Caithness. On 67 minutes a fast break on the left saw Crossley supply Macdonald 20 metres out in front of goal but McCulloch stepped back to gather a ball in danger of creeping over him. On 74 minutes, James Harris set himself up well to escape free on the left, advanced into the box on the left, then inexplicably pulled his shot across goal, without hitting the target. Three minutes later came the *coup de grâce*: an enormous "Tago" free-kick, just inside the Castletown half, on the left, came high into the box, to be volleyed home, despite McCulloch's valiant efforts to block, from 12 metres by an unmarked Chris Macleod, thus emulating his scoring feat from '08.

Final score-lines never tell the whole story of any sporting contest. Overall, na Gormaich can be more than satisfied with a controlled and controlling performance throughout, sticking conscientiously to form and tactic in a game which was by no means easy and was still open till the 57th minute. The back-line were towering influences throughout, with "Pongo" and Calum Tom providing *tours de force*, to stifle the opposition and bolster movement forward. Castletown were dogged and committed, certainly no push-overs, though seemed less than they were that afternoon in 2008, despite having largely the same personnel; there was a lack of sharpness up front, and lack of will at times - and support - let them down. If Murray had taken that golden chance in 56 minutes, at 0-1 down, who knows?

Their playmaker, Gavin Henderson, was drowned in midfield where Carloway possession and cover essentially negated any nice touch. Crossley, "Squeg" and Macphail effectively ran the game, with Dan Crossley increasingly uncontrollable as the game progressed. Carloway's pace was a continuing fundamental problem for the Caithness back, allowing repeated opportunity for shape-shifting and drawing defenders narrow, and creating wide space for "Tago" and "Dokus" to surge. On the ferry home, there were the same glum faces as in 2008, but this time it was because of a ferry running four hours late, Carloway and Back having both experienced victory, though, unfortunately, once again the Niseachs were unlucky, this time joined by

Point. And so, the Blues and their fans have to go through all this again on the 9th July, against Kirkwall Rovers, HAC winners in 1997, 4-2 versus Contin, and conquerors in this campaign of Point and the 2009 cup-winners, Kirkwall Thorfinn.

Castletown Man of the Match: Gavin Henderson.

Carloway Man of the Match: Calum Tom Moody.