

Highland Amateur Cup Quarter-Final:

Carloway 5 (1)

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald 32

Gordon "Tago" Macdonald 47, 90+1

Dan Crossley 49

Chris Macleod 82

Kirkwall Rovers 1 (1)

James Tait 45+1

At Maryburgh Playing Field,

Saturday, 9.7.11

Gordon Craigie

Andrew "Tago" Maciver Domhnall Mackay Calum "Tom" Moody Darren Mackinnon

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Donnie Macphail Dan Crossley Murdo "Sqweq" Macleod Gordon "Tago" Macdonald

Archie Macdonald

Subs.: Seumas Macleod (Donnie Macphail) 70; Donald "D.I" Maclennan (Calum "Tom" Moody) 77; Chris Macleod (Archie Macdonald) 79.

And so the hour was finally upon the Blues, to overcome the fancied men from Orkney and sail the good ship, "Carloway" into previously uncharted territory, an HAC Semi-Final, against the favourites, Avoch, no less. Rovers were HAC winners in '97 and en route to Maryburgh had dismissed the '09 winners, Kirkwall Thorfinn, and our own Rubhachs, a result of defensive lapses, while the Blues had had to dig deep, grinding out a 2-1 victory over Lochs at Leurbost in one of the most exciting cup-ties ever on Lewis, then, after a tricky even first-half at Fortrose, swamping their '08 conquerors in a rampant second period.

Lady Fortune smiled on na Gormaich, as Andrew "Tago" Maciver (a colossus against Castletown) and Seumas Macleod were available, while Domhnall Mackay, indisposed for the Round 3 game, appeared; mainland emigre, Chris Macleod, so influential as a substitute at Fortrose, also answered the call, but Kenny "Beag" Maclennan and Kevin "Gochan" Macleod were still injured. Effectively, this resulted in "Pongo" coming in at right-back, Darren Mackinnon moving left, and "D.I" dropping to the bench, alongside both Macleod brothers, Andrew "V.P." Macleod, and Kevin "Barra" Macneil; Archie Macdonald once again was called on to lead, as he had done so efficiently for most of the previous game, after the early injury to "Gochan".

A huge support witnessed the teams open on a narrow, dampish pitch high above the Conon, giving a beautiful vista of the Moray Firth in the distance to the South-East, with Dingwall visible on its Northern shore. And bang, what has now become a trademark Carloway opening! The first foul of the game, wide on the left, midway into Rovers' half, allowed "Tago" to send a vicious left-footer whizzing high across goal where Calum "Tom" met it perfectly 14 metres out to thud a header against the bar close to the keeper's left-hand post.

An inconclusive battle commenced in midfield, whereby Rovers' overall gameplan unravelled: two Jim Holton-type central defenders blocked forward-running attackers well and were untroubled in the air, but were slow to turn and susceptible to the fast wing breaks of "Dokus" and "Tago", the latter lying deep and drawing the right-back out, in turn drawing the two big men right, while "Dokus's" marker repeatedly moved in as central cover, giving him an extra metre or two. Two ball-carriers flanked a tall central playmaker, a troublesome left-winger lay deep, but the main danger was the Revie-type pack in the forward centre, who defied cover if they moved at pace with slick wall-pass movements directly at Moody and Mackay. On 11 minutes this tactic just failed to deliver when the final pass was just short, 16 metres out, then, a sudden change of approach in 17 minutes led to a long ball being flicked on behind the Blues' centre backs but a covering Mackinnon brilliantly blocked, 12 metres from goal.

On 20 minutes Rovers' keeper just booted away from "Tago", freed behind the back-line; Dan Crossley gathered the clearance, 25 metres out, but the goalie managed to scramble back to clutch his attempted lob. Open play was even, but Carloway gradually created regular chances. On 23 minutes a Macphail drive just slipped past from 16 metres; a minute later Crossley was blocked coming in on the right bye-line, before the breakthrough arrived after the half-hour. Carloway's own Ronald de Boer, Darren Mackinnon, gathered the ball wide on the left, midway within Rovers' half, and sent a glorious diagonal across the defence to "Dokus", drifting free, wide right, and his first-time reverse strike from 16 metres screamed low inside the right-hand corner of the net. Two minutes later, Rovers' minder kept the Orcadians alive, when he brilliantly beat away another "Dokus" attempt from an identical move and position. However, just as na Gormaich thought they had effected a satisfactory first-half, the sky unexpectedly darkened: a fast break on the right saw a smart cut-back from the bye-line just slip under Mackinnon's foot for James Tait to nip behind the big men and flick under Craigie from 6 metres.

Every contest has turning-points, significant times to score or lose goals. Kirkwall sensed the force was now with them. An immediate free-kick wide on the left led to a header from 16 metres just wide. However, as Rovers surged, a game-changing three minutes erupted: Domhnall Mackay broke up their next attack, just inside his own half, heading strongly to his left, where Mackinnon swung the ball immediately into Macphail bursting through the centre, under pressure, and his Cantona-style pass between the two piano-shifters freed "Tago" to race on to send a measured slip low under the keeper's right from the edge of the box. Two minutes later, "Tago" flighted in a free-kick Roberto Baggio would have been proud of, 25 metres out on the left, and a facing Crossley stepped back to back-head home, via the goalie's despairing fingertips, from 8 metres.

Rovers, unbeaten this season, were clearly in an unfamiliar place, and wobbled alarmingly, electing to retain their formation but drastically change their strategy. Surprisingly, a four-man attack continued but the neat play through the centre which characterized their dangerous approach-play in the first half was discarded, and the long ball used increasingly and passes

channelled to the central playmaker or left-winger, to flight behind the defence. However, this favoured a watertight Carloway back-line and pace exploited space in midfield and static stoppers.

On 52 minutes "Dokus" freed Macdonald through the centre but his shot from 16 metres was blocked. From the corner Calum "Tom", 8 metres out, flicked narrowly over. Two minutes later "Sqweg" allowed Crossley to outpace his marker on the left but his measured slip, one-on-one from 16 metres on the left of the box, was blocked by the keeper's heel.

The result hung in the balance through to the last twenty minutes; as Macdonald, "Dokus", and Macphail tired, the Blues gradually drifted back, confident in their ability to frustrate an attack that did not create a single clear-cut chance in the second half. The introduction of Chris Macleod in the last eleven minutes provided an explosive finale. Immediately he outpaced his marker right of centre, but his placed shot from 14 metres was miraculously flicked on to the post by Rovers' outstanding performer. Two minutes later the semi-final beckoned: yet another golden defence-splitter from Mackinnon led to a Carl Lewis-type sprint from Macleod, yet, amazingly, the keeper once again got a hand to his slip from 16 metres to divert the ball on to the inside of his left-hand post, from which it rolled along the goal-line, hit the other post, and went in.

In injury-time, the knife was really turned in the wound for the Tangerines, when a neat move on the left involving Crossley and Chris Macleod sent "Tago" ghosting in from the left. Again, the keeper was out like lightning, but this time "Tago" second-guessed him with the early lob, from the left edge of the box, and though the goalie touched it, he couldn't prevent it carrying on into the net.

Even the Chairman would find it difficult to find anything wanting in this performance. The back four were faultless, decisive in their tackling and clearing, and retaining their shape throughout: did "Pongo" cross the halfway line during the whole game? Did Darren Mackinnon give the ball away once? A forcing midfield was equally obstructive and creative; and the pace of Crossley, "Dokus", and "Tago" was unmanageable.

Were Kirkwall taken aback by the quality of the opposition? Certainly, they looked gobsmacked at the end, but that might simply be a reflection of the result. Despite Rovers' central four-man nexus being awkward to combat and threatening in the first half, the ratio of chances throughout the game vastly favoured na Gormaich as Carloway, repeatedly, outthought and outpaced an open midfield and sluggish defence, more and more so, as the game progressed. For once, the Blues capitalized on this statistic, each goal in its own way a peach, both in creation and execution. However, this game is already history and the hard part now is to replicate this stunning performance in as many games as possible.

Will lochdar Saints be bothered by this result? Probably not. Avoch? A little, maybe. And the other Western Isles teams? Who knows? Each game is a stand-alone 90 minutes. However, a dash of this quality in each of Carloway's remaining games would, doubtless, bring some silverware, at last, to Cnoc

a'Choilich. Displays like this certainly merit it.

Kirkwall Man of the Match: the goalkeeper.

Carloway Man of the match: Dan Crossley.