

Coop Cup Quarter-Final:

lochdar Saints 2 (2) Carloway 1 (0)

Angus "Nooie" Campbell 2

Joe Macneil (o.g.) 71

John Angus "Wee Man" Macphee 3

Referee: D.A. Macinnes.

At Lionacleit.

Saturday, 16.7.11

Gordon Craigie

Andrew "Tago" Maciver Domhnall Mackay Calum Tom Moody Darren Mackinnon
Seumas Macleod Dan Crossley Murdo "Squeg" Macleod (capt.) Gordon "Tago"
Macdonald

Kevin "Gochan" Macleod Archie Macdonald

Subs.: Donald "D.I." MacIennan (Kevin "Gochan" Macleod) 56; Calum Macleod (Seumas Macleod) 69.

Yellow Cards: Donald "D.I." MacIennan 80; Archie Macdonald 86.

Winning creates pressure; it doesn't diminish it. When a team starts to win regularly, it soon becomes desperate to win every game. A defeat - any defeat - provokes abject misery. However, the adrenalin-fuelled ecstasy of success dissipates rapidly, *"Like snow falls in the river"*, and then the next trial appears. Of the next three games, which was most important? lochdar Saints in the Coop Cup? Lochs in the League? Or Avoch in the HAC? For a winning team, the answer is: none! A successful team feels it must win them all, to maintain its momentum, its supremacy. Defeat is not an option.

With this mindset, the Fianna charged Uist-wards, where recent experiences have been mixed: 1-3 misery in Benbecula in the '07 HAC; two nightmares in Daliburgh versus Southend - 4-7 in the '08 Coop, courtesy of a striker's masterclass from Roddy Campbell; and 2-3 in the '09 HAC, due to a questionable refereeing decision; then two exhilarating triumphs over North Uist Utd. - a 2-1 war of attrition at Lionacleit in the '06 HAC, and a 6-0 romp on a Paible cornfield in last year's HAC.

An aggressive 4-4-2 formation took the field: a rested Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald had not travelled; Donnie Macphail was unavailable. Andrew "Tago" Maciver returned at right wing-back, with Darren Mackinnon switching left; the midfield became a foursome, and Kevin "Gochan" Macleod and Archie Macdonald (an ex-Saint) led; in the bull-pen were Donald "D.I." MacIennan, Kevin "Barra" Macneil, Calum Macleod, Seumas Macdonald, and Kevin Anderson.

There is a developing tendency for Long Island clubs to view Uist and Barra sides with less respect than their peers and mainland outfits; dangerous, when one recalls that Saints had already disposed of Point in the previous round and were agonisingly close to eliminating Back from this year's HAC at Col Uarach. Hopefully, the Blues remembered this, when the whistle blew at the new Lionacleit pitch, on a warmish, beautifully sunny day, though clouds threatened in the distance.

It was a Carloway game so there was the customary explosive opening,

unfortunately at the wrong end of the park this time. The Blues have been setting all sorts of new records this season - another one was to be two down in three minutes. Saints' first move forward down their left led to Carloway giving away a needless free-kick, midway inside their own half, wide on their right. Thus, John Angus Macphee had the opportunity to drop a textbook cross behind the Carloway big men which bounced up and back off the shins of a startled Craigie, for Angus Campbell to thwack home off the 6-metre line.

Carloway shrugged it off, began their usual patient build-up, lost the ball, then as Saints attacked again, were adjudged to have fouled once more, close to the earlier position. A carbon copy of the opening goal followed, this time "Nooie" sending it behind the back-line, but slightly to Craigie's left, to bounce untouched just inside the post. Carloway's calm was admirable as they tried again to build steadily from the back. However, though they were extremely careful, and faultless, in defence, the midfield struggled to gain shape and the unsettling opening led to the final pass being mishit against an opposition, understandably exploiting of their immediate two-goal cushion, to retreat in numbers, clear long, and employ the breaking pace on either wing through Ally Downie and "Wee Man" Macphee.

On 16 minutes, a disputed free-kick on the edge of the Carloway box saw Craigie anticipate well to save from "Wee Man", before na Gormaich finally came to life in 23 minutes when a Mackinnon/ "Tago" move on the left led to a low cross flashing across Saints' goal, 8 metres out, just out of reach of Macdonald and "Gochan". A Mackinnon cross led to Macleod heading past from 16 metres, then, on the half-hour, Stephen Scott finally earned his pay, stopping a strike from just outside the box, from Carloway's centre-half, Calum Tom! The Blues now pressed relentlessly while Saints defended across the line, reminiscent of Leeds Utd.'s / Liverpool's (in the early Shankly years) away tactics in Europe in the 60s and 70s. Gaps appeared at the back: a neat move on the right led to a wasted poke by Downie from 10 metres into Craigie's arms. On 35 minutes an excellent Moody block under pressure, facing two assailants, thwarted a rapid move through the centre, then "Pongo" matched this feat on the left, grinding the ball away for a corner. The half ended with "Pongo" heading past at the other end from 16 metres, off a cross from the left.

Where to go was na Gormaich's problem. They had all the play, but Saints were having all the chances. They couldn't unpick the defence, and the Devil continually clutched their heels. They had fallen into the trap that Scotland set France at Hampden '07, playing at the slower team's pace, the so-called *Birmingham City* syndrome, facing a team that can run with you, match you for effort and aggression, frustrate you, then feast on your mistakes. On 52 minutes, a long ball found an attacker running clear; Craigie tried to boot clear; the collision sent the ball running free. For some reason, the goalkeeper didn't pick it up but then mishit a second attempt to boot clear, straight to Carl Macphee, lurking 20 metres away. Macphee tried to lobshot Craigie but this allowed the goalminder to pull off a stupendous save, high to his left, and palm it away for a corner.

The next minute, a Carloway break on the right led to "Pongo" stroking the ball towards goal but Harry Luney, an "Uibhisteach" rock all afternoon, swept

away to the left, in front of the goalmouth. On 59 minutes another break permitted Carl Macphee to whistle in a shot from the left, 22 metres out, but Craigie saw it coming all the way to flick it expertly to his left.

Midway through the half, the Blues had two sudden chances: "Tago", growing old on the left, waiting for the ball at feet, cut in effortlessly to leave his marker dead, then crossed; the ball broke right, where Darren Mackinnon (now right, as "Gochan" had been sacrificed, with "D.I" taking left wing-back), reverse passed, but it was blocked. Then "Pongo" finally got right, crossed, but Archie Macdonald's exquisite right-foot hook showed Scott's quality at last, as he knocked away high to his left.

Then, after all this painstaking effort to create, an undeserved goal arrived out of nothing. Once more, our own Lothar Emmerich, "Tago", left his marker somewhere in Loch Ba to turn in and send in the sweetest of Martin Peters crosses just inside the back-line for the hapless Joe Macneil to nod into the net at the near post. Quality with a capital Q! Beautiful header, too. Plain bad - or good - luck, depending on who you support.

A moment later, however, the Blues almost needed new underwear, when Carl Macphee, sent clear slightly to the left, flighted the ball beautifully over an advancing Craigie, but the dip was not great enough to prevent it flicking the top of the bar and past. On 74 minutes Macphee was freed again on the left, but his cross/ shot wide on the left, from almost the bye-line, flew across goal with no takers. In 80 minutes a Saints' free-kick right on the edge of the box was blocked before Mackinnon, irrepressible coming through right, was denied as he tried to feed Macdonald in front of goal. In injury-time, Ally Downie almost turned the knife in the wound when he nodded a cross from the left past from 16 metres.

The HAC excepted, cup assignments have been unfulfilling affairs for the Blues. This tie presented a textbook example of the Mourinho doctrine: all the possession, running, neat moves, and classy build-ups in the history of football are futile, if you do not create any chances, have testing shots on target; fire-power, to be explicit. Frequently, the Blues constructed the golden chance; then passed the ball sideways.

For considerable periods they had the Ulbhstich penned back but could not find the password. Where was Scott Macaulay, "Savo", Neil Bowman, when you need them? To fire this white sphere between the white horizontal lines when you see them? Stephen Scott could easily have re-designed his web-page during the first half. Quality goalkeeper or not, it's hard to tell, he had so little to do. Yet, a strange conundrum is evident here: Carlaway did not actually play badly at Lionacleite and certainly cannot be criticised on grounds of effort, or of hunger to win; the back four were solid and desperate to support, indeed functioned better as a midfield than the actual midfield did, hence allowing the chances above; the back four played like eight.

The midfield toiled, experimented, ran and ran, but could not find a shape. An unremitting attempt was made to play football, keep the ball on the ground, at feet, build from the back into midfield, who competed tirelessly, while Archie Macdonald no doubt had little trouble sleeping last night, considering the effort he expended running and chasing to confound his ex-teammates. "Tago", also, maintained position on the left touchline, electric when the ball

came in front of him, leaving Saints' right back to untie his legs, but largely unused against a vulnerable right. Take out the first three minutes and na Gormaich would have been deserved winners. Answers to this enigma on a postcard, please, to explain why all this effort, expertise, and ingenuity did not add up to victory, preferably before 7 p.m. on Monday night. Best answer: Season Ticket, 2012, to Cnoc a' Choilich. Most Sarcastic Answer: Season Ticket, 2012, to Col Uarach.

lochdar Saints Man of the Match: John Angus "Wee Man" Macphee.

Carloway Man of the Match: Darren Mackinnon.