

Moldova Lewis Cup Round 2:

Point 3 (2)

*Andrew Murray 41 (pen.), 44
Calum "Caley" Mackay 46*

Carloway 2 (2)

*Andrew "Tago" Maciver 22
Calum Macleod 29*

At Garrabost.

Monday, 8.8.11.

Ref.: Robert Mackay.

David Beaton

Andrew "Tago" Maciver Calum "Tom" Moody Domhnall

Mackay ☒ Darren Mackinnon

*Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Dan Crossley Donnie Macphail Seumas
Macleod Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod (capt.)*

Calum Macleod ☒

*Subs.: Gordon "Tago" Macdonald (Donnie Macphail) 61; Kenny "Beag"
Maclennan (Calum Macleod) 76.*

Yellow cards: Calum Macleod 66.

Red card: Domhnall Mackay 41.

No doubt Carloway entered this tie, hoping that, "*Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning*". A missed opportunity last Monday had provided them with a painful learning experience before attention needed to be totally focussed on this final chance to achieve some enduring Cup glory in 2011, knowing that victory tonight would set up a Semi-Final against League rivals and *the-team-to-beat*, Back.

However, the Bacach's last-minute victory at Goathill against United on Friday must also have reminded the Blues that this season had witnessed a relative decline in Lochs's traditional dominance and much more even competition among all nine clubs, so that Point's recent poor League results meant nothing in cup competition. Indeed, were it not for a Yashin-class save from West Side's keeper Macphee two minutes from time in the ABC Final, that cup would presently be sitting proudly in the Rubhachs' trophy room.

Yet visits to Garrabost, lately, had been slightly more fruitful for the Blues than those to certain other grounds, emerging victorious in their last three League visits, and scoring a stunning Coop victory last season, courtesy of an outstanding shoot-out performance from sadly departed "Gordie" Mackenzie.

Kevin "Gochan" Macleod was the only "no-show" for na Gormaich, so Calum Macleod was entrusted with a starting opportunity to continue his goalscoring exploits up front, while inspirational anchorman, Calum Tom Moody, returned to partner Domhnall Mackay in central defence. Gordon "Tago" Macdonald dropped to the bench to allow Seumas Macleod to re-enter midfield, joining Gordon Craigie (stepping aside for David Beaton), Kenny "Beag" Maclennan, and Donald "D.I."

Maclennan.

A howling rain-spattered sou'-westerly provided each side with an initial challenge: master the elements first; worry about the opposition later, as a wind-reinforced Carloway swept forward in numbers from the start. However, sending the ball forward at the right height and pace to skid off a greasy surface presented an immediate problem. On 3 minutes "Dokus" did catch a ball spinning away ten metres from the right bye-line and crossed square to a running Seumas Macleod on the edge of the far 6-metre box, but his reverse pass was stabbed against the shins of a surprised Daniel Maclennan by Macphail, 12 metres out.

Untidy play developed in midfield as both sides struggled against the elements and each other to establish a shape and rhythm on the ground. Then, on 13 minutes, a repeat performance right by "Dokus", sending the ball high into the area, where, first, Seumas Macleod was blocked, then Macphail, before the latter hooked the ball over Maclennan's right-hand bar. On 19 minutes Mackinnon came charging through on the left and from midway within the Rubhachs' half picked out "Pongo" with a rising ball forward, who in turn nodded inwards for Crossley to lob over from 16 metres.

Three minutes later came the threatened breakthrough as the Blues' slightly increasing pressure paid off. Another characteristic charge by "Pongo", down the right into the Point half, saw him turning into the centre before slipping the ball right, then continuing his run into the box. The chip came long for Seumas Macleod wide left, 10 metres out but his attempt at control rebounded square, hit a defender, came back to him, and he reacted swiftly to lift the ball inwards to the newly-arriving "Pongo" to side-foot home, shoulder-high to the goalkeeper's left from 10 metres.

At this Point were struggling as na Gormaich's back-line pushed high to the halfway line and Murray, Mackay, and Maciver were unsupplied. "Pongo" and Mackinnon were pushing deep on either wing, "Dokus" lying wide, and Crossley and Seumas Macleod repeatedly surging in support of the elusive "Caley". On 27 minutes Point had their first half-chance, when a break on the left led to a low diagonal into the centre. This led to a scramble in which two shots were blocked, before Carloway once more surged down the park, as "Dokus" was again picked out on the right. His searching cross set up Macphail to feed Crossley in the centre, 14 metres out, but his header cleared the bar. A minute later Mackinnon burst down the left and sent a beautifully angled ball inward between back and stopper for "Caley" to run across the line left and behind, draw the keeper, and slip it under his left-hand side from 12 metres and just inside the far post.

Immediately Point responded: on 32 minutes "Caley" Mackay, supplied from the left, gave Beaton his first real piece of action when he denied the striker brilliantly from 18 metres, low to his right; a minute later a Point move ended with Mackay in front of goal, 16 metres out, but he clipped his shot just outside Beaton's left-hand post.

On 35 minutes Calum Macleod, looking suspiciously offside on the right, just inside the opposition half, was allowed to run on but from 20 metres lifted the ball over the advancing keeper, and the bar. The Rubhachs were now gradually making an impression: on 37 minutes Anthony Maciver ghosted in behind the Carloway back-line, just inside the Blues' half, ran in on goal, but Beaton blocked his stab at goal magnificently with his left leg, just inside the Carloway box.

Four minutes later we were treated to a reprise of this action, albeit with a different ending. Moody and Calum Mackay tussled for the ball and missed, deceiving Domhnall Mackay, and once more Maciver raced in on goal from 10-15 metres into the Blues' half, in the centre. He moved into the box, put the ball to the left of the diving Beaton, whose attempted block clicked his heel slightly but didn't bring him down, before Mackay, following up, crashed into the prone Beaton, somersaulted over him, and as he came down, his outstretched hand touched Mackay's leg or heel. Calum Mackay didn't do a Klinsmann but kept racing after the ball to the left, to catch it before it went out. No one appeared to claim a penalty. Was it a bye-kick or a corner kick? Then the referee lined up all the players on the edge of the box; was it a Point free-kick on the edge of the box?

Then the ball was placed on the penalty spot, and the book appeared. At first it seemed David Beaton was in trouble. Then Domhnall Mackay was called over and sent him off. Hmmmm No comment. David Beaton chose left; Andrew Murray fired straight. Na Gormaich had still not come to terms with the absence of their twin central lynch-pin, rearranging positionally, when Point, sensing indecision in the opposition ranks, attacked again; the move ended with the ball being cleverly switched left for an unmarked Murray to sweep in and slip the ball past the advancing keeper's right from 12 metres.

In the space of four minutes, na Gormaich seemed to have moved from a comfortable cruise control to a desperate fight for qualification. And it was about to get worse. Seumas Macleod had dropped back from left midfield to right stopper, while "Dokus" started in a less forward role on the right, with the central midfield, especially Dan Crossley and Donnie Macphail, now more holding than forcing, but there was no time to assess how these changes might have affected Carloway's game, as Point immediately broke wide and fast on the left, and a screaming head-high cross from the left bye-line from Maciver was met perfectly by the head of Mackay running towards him across goal, 12 metres out, to send a beautiful pinpoint bullet just inside Beaton's left-hand post. An absolute peach, à la Norrie Davidson!

Approach and control seemed to have switched shirts at half-time, with Point now forcing, and Carloway unable to establish any presence or form to their play. On 56 minutes Maciver was sent clear on the left, then came into the box diagonally, but Beaton rescued the Blues by blocking his low shot superbly from 16 metres for a corner. Two minutes later Mackay shot past Carloway's right-hand post from the edge of the box, before a combination of desperate recovery tackling from Macleod and Moody and good luck managed to crowd out the slippery Murray in front of goal on the penalty spot.

The arrival of "Tago" on the hour in an attempt to kickstart a stuttering machine did lead to na Gormaich's first real attempt on goal of the second half on 63 minutes, when a Crossley shot from the edge of the box was safely held by MacIennan. Gradually signs of life appeared, as, increasingly, Point seemed to be settling for what they had. Gillies, Mackenzie, and the backs were staying spread at the back, covered by a rapidly retreating midfield, and using the long ball in front of the rapidly manoeuvring Murray and Mackay, while Maciver stayed wide on the left to receive. A dangerous approach, which allowed the odd chances suddenly to come the Blues' way, but not frequently.

On 72 minutes, the first "Pongo" surge of the half saw a reverse wall-pass free him on the right to advance into the Point area but his low cross across the box saw

Calum Macleod mishit, 12 metres out, the ball rebound back across to "Dokus", whose attempt was blocked and cleared. Three minutes later it was "Sweg's" turn to escape into empty space on the right and his cross saw a "Caley" shot blocked 12 metres out in front of goal before returning to "Sqweg", and he was blocked in turn inside the box.

The pace quickened, mainly towards Daniel MacIannan, as the clock ticked down. On 78 minutes Crossley fired over from the edge of the box; five minutes later, Mackinnon charged in on the left, set up by Kenny "Beag", but sent the ball just outside Point's right-hand post from 16 metres. On 86 minutes "Dokus" drove past MacIannan's left-hand post from 16 metres, before a final flurry saw "Dokus" once more move down the right and cross low but Kenny "Beag's" low drive on the near side of goal, 12 metres out, was blocked and booted clear.

It was a sad ending for the Blues, gut-wrenching too, to a night which, on the 40-minute mark, could not have been predicted to end the way it did. Lack of sharpness in front of goal cost them dearly, just as it had in the Aths game last week, as they swarmed into the Point box early in the game. There is no doubt that the penalty, more so the sending-off, altered everything; which team could lose a towering presence like Domhnall Mackay and not be drastically changed?

A deep sense of injustice, almost tangible in the cold Rubhach air, permeated the Blues' squad deep into the second half and contributed to a mood of dismal apathy which seemed to inhibit any creative movement from the men from Carloway, and anger at the 50/50 decisions which went against them. Point should really have made more of this period, up till nearly the 70th minute, and have punished the heads-down self-absorption which was strangling the Blues, but they were as wasteful as the Blues had been and, apart from a few near things in the ten minutes after Mackay's goal, which included that wonderful Beaton save from Maciver, they allowed the opportunities to drift away. A dangerous practice in cut-throat competitions, like Lewis and Harris football.

In football, as in life itself, "bad" things have a nasty habit of occurring - often - and just have to be accepted, then dealt with. How reverses are coped with, indeed, indicates the character of the individual, group, or team concerned. And full marks to na Gormaich, as they finally looked up, saw the clock, and changed up a gear, played more like themselves, continually changed formation, tried new approaches, but time was against them, and Lady Luck deserted them, as a well-marshalled defence led by Alasdair Gillies and Iain Mackenzie, and an increasingly confident ex-Siarach behind them between the sticks, repeatedly closed them down and denied them in the last quarter of an hour.

Point Man of the Match: Iain Mackenzie.

Carloway Man of the Match: Darren Mackinnon.