

Highland Amateur Cup Round 2:

lochdar Saints 5 (2) Carloway 5 (1)

*John Angus "Wee Man" Macphee 32
Archie Macdonald 44, 67, 78
Harry Luney 80*

*Kevin "Gochan" Macleod 30
Scott Macaulay 54, 79
Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald 70
Own goal 75*

after extra time. lochdar Saints win 5-4 on penalties.

Referee: D.A.Macinnnes.

At Lionacleit.

Saturday, 26.5.12

Ali "Tolsta" Maciver

*Andrew "Togo" Maciver Seumas Macleod Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Donald "D.I."
MacIennan*

*Kenny "Dokus"Macdonald Dan Crossley Murdo "Sqweq" Macleod Calum "Caley"
Macleod*

Kevin "Gochan" Macleod Scott Macaulay.

*Subs.: Donnie Macphail (Calum "Caley" Macleod) 53; Calum Iain Macleod (Murdo "Sqweg"
Macleod) 67.*

Yellow Cards: Donnie Macphail 71; Seumas Macleod 115.

Another HAC, another visit to the Uists, in what is rapidly becoming an annual adventure to test na Gormaich's ability to compete on the wider Highland and island stage. If you are unable to defeat your island rivals, you're unlikely to get anywhere in the open rounds. Though impressive last season on their mainland campaign, defeating Castletown and Kirkwall Rovers, en route to an exhilarating semi-final versus Avoch in Ullapool, visits to the southern isles have frequently been mind-numbing, even psychosis-inducing: defeats to Benbecula (1-3, the '07 HAC); two nightmares in Daliburgh versus Southend (4-7 in the '08 Coop Cup and 2-3 in the '09 HAC); welcome trend-breaking victories over North Uist Utd.(2-1 at Lionacleit in the '06 HAC; 6-0 at Paible in the '10 HAC); before last season's less than happy confrontation with today's opposition in the Coop Cup, when a couple of early setbacks proved just too difficult to overcome.

An imaginative paralysis seems to drop on the squad when they head south, coupled with a strong admixture of ill-luck. Is it arrogance? Certainly doesn't look like it from the grandstand. If anything, last year's confrontation had shown the quality of the new kids on the Uist block, superseding long-term champions, Southend: an earlier Coop victory over Point and gut-wrenching loss of a final minute HAC goal to eventual finalists, Back, and extra-time loss had signalled a warning of serious intent onfield.

Today the Uibhistich had a familiar look: pain--in-the-tackle "Wee Man" enforcing in midfield, abetting class playmaker, Angus Campbell; Harry Luney providing the support and ball-spread; and additional unwanted trouble in firebrand ace-chance-taker, ex-Blue, Archie Macdonald, leading the line, eternally holding, laying-off, scoring. Steven Scott's leg injury persisted; today, "Pedro" deputised.

Selection problems continued to mount for the Blues: added to long-term injured stars, Calum Tom Moody and Gordon "Tago" Macdonald, were today's unavailable stalwarts, David Beaton and Gus Maciver. Thus, Ali "Tolsta" Maciver was obliged to start in goal; Andrew "Tago" Maciver returned at right wing/back, and the rest of the side maintained the formation that started on Friday night at Garrabost.

What a setting! A stunning day to watch a football match, less so to play in one, marred only by a fresh easterly breeze blowing diagonally across the field, perhaps the grass a few centimetres too long. Both sides needed no introduction. The opening half-hour gave no intimation of the drama that would unfold, as both defences coped easily with either sides' initial thrusts: Saints, holding wind advantage, slightly overhitting, and Carloway opting for the methodical approach, then final diagonal defence-splitter or raised pass centrally. Carloway came closest, without really testing "Pedro".

On 12 minutes Crossley released "Gochan" but his cross from 20 metres on the left passed over. Three minutes later "Pongo" burst through into the middle. Just inside Saints' half, he found "Dokus" on the right, who cut inside and laid in for interplay between Macaulay and "Gochan", who set up the following Crossley, 20 metres out in the centre, but his drive went harmlessly past on the left. On 26 minutes Macaulay managed the perfect release ball to "Caley" unmarked on the left. He carried forward, but his shot from 22 metres out on the left went well over. Two minutes later "Dokus" freed "Gochan" through the centre but he lost control on the edge of the box.

Then the real game - and fun, if you can call it that - started. On the half-hour an enormous "Tolsta" kick-out was back-headed on leftish by Macaulay 10 metres inside Saints' half, to "Gochan" edging behind his marker to run in on goal. From the edge of the box he let fly with an unsaveable left-foot shot, shoulder-high, just inside "Pedro's" left-hand post. An absolute peach! Then the action left the script. A corner on Carloway's left broke out leftish from a crowded area to the edge of the box where No. 11(?) composed himself and drilled a powerful right-foot daisy-cutter to thwack off the base of "Tolsta's" left-hand post, then spin unluckily for the Blues across goal to the far post where "Wee Man" reacted swiftest to slot an exquisite low drive between the recovering "Tolsta" and the right-hand post from 8 metres.

Na Gormaich had clearly thought it was plain sailing after the opener and struggled at first to maintain focus. On 38 minutes, the endlessly creative Crossley broke to chip from 22 metres leftish, over a retreating defence, but the ball just beat the swiftly arriving "Dokus" 10 metres out. Then the clouds really started to gather in Carloway's valley of joy. On 41 minutes a "Wee Man" free-kick was handled safely by Maciver; the same player shot past a minute later, before the gods really decided to punish the Blues on 44 minutes for losing the ball carelessly in midfield. Saints immediately worked the ball down their right. Out on the touchline, 20 metres from the bye-line, no.10 turned back under pressure from three markers, to send a beautiful, left-foot curler just over the retreating defence, but too far and at an awkward height for "Tolsta" to reach, and Archie "Uibhisteach" stooped, 8 metres out in

front of goal, to head a perfect connect wide and lowish past the keeper's left.

To their credit, the Blues tried to work through their clear sense of disbelief. The first half had again demonstrated the Mourinho doctrine: ball possession/territory doesn't necessarily guarantee victory (regard Barcelona v. Chelsea; Bayern Munich v. Chelsea); it's what a team does with it in the final third of the park that counts. If a team's strike rate is dependably high, they can let the opposition play across their midfield, their defence; they can cope and occasionally strike back. Iochdar had taught Blues this clearly in the first half: basically, they had let na Gormaich come at them for half an hour, and then come to life and threatened repeatedly for the next quarter, even though Carlaway still had far greater control of the play. A malfunctioning midfield, where everything devolved upon Crossley's enthusiasm, drive, and creativity limited options, also.

Once more into the breach, then. On 49 minutes a break on the right led to a throw-in at the corner flag breaking out to "Dokus" on the right edge of the box but his drive was tipped over. Mackay drove past on the left from 23 metres, before the equalizer arrived on 54 minutes, when Crossley came through the middle to supply Macaulay moving off his marker to give "Pedro" no chance low to his right from 16 metres. Two minutes later it was nearly three. A "Dokus" free-kick from 22 metres centrally thudded upwards off the bar, to drop down on "Gochan" 8 metres out in front of goal outjumping the pack, but somehow his firm header cleared the bar.

On 61 minutes a "Dokus" corner had to be palmed away, before na Gormaich were stunned once more, as a Saints' break on the right was played across the box to Archie Macdonald, who, in quintessential predatory mood on the left corner of the box, gathered to send a right-foot screamer, via "Pongo's" foot, high and just inside "Tolsta's" right-hand post. A rush of tit-for-tat goals followed as Carlaway sought to claw their way back; Saints chased decisive victory. On 70 minutes a central through ball was headed on and back by "Gochan" 20 metres out for "Dokus" to burst into the box and drive low past "Pedro" from 12 metres. Five minutes later a right-foot Crossley corner on the left curled over the keeper and was helped on into the net amid a rush of bodies.

A minute later the chance appeared to kill the contest, when a Crossley lay-off, as he burst into the box, allowed an unmarked "Dokus" to advance from the right, but from 12 metres he drove past "Pedro" but beyond the far post. Two minutes later a corner on the Blues' right broke across to Saints' own Lou Macari on the left, 12 metres out, and he drilled the ball low inside "Tolsta's" right-hand post. Immediately Carlaway were back in front as they broke through the middle and "Gochan" supplied Macaulay from 24 metres to deliver a spectacular strike high to the keeper's right from 18 metres. Hardly had anyone drawn breath, spectator and player alike, when it was level once more. A corner on the left fell to Luney directly in front of goal, 8 metres out, and he nodded home.

Extra-time proved less frenetic, as two pairs of exhausted players hoped more for an opposition mistake, than a result from their own openings. The

chances favoured the Blues: on 91 minutes Crossley headed past; on 104 minutes a "Dokus" cross freed "Pongo" to head over, before a chance arrived at either end in the second period, "Pedro" holding a Crossley corner, then a Saints' shot clearing the bar. The final opportunity, on 119 minutes, saw "Gochan" supply Macaulay to fire over and wide. And then it was the collective nightmare of penalties.

What can you say about such an experience: on a sense-achingly beautiful day, in the most spectacular of surroundings, to witness twenty plus local young men fight their hearts out as wholeheartedly as if the World Club Cup was at stake? And then after aggressively confronting each other for two hours, to party together for another hour, before separating? Anyway, another HAC drifts past for the boys in blue, another cup hope vanishes. Not for want of trying, though. Ah, well, "*In the kingdom of hope, it is never winter*". One day, we can only hope our "*winter of discontent*" will be "*made glorious summer by these sons of*" Carloway.

It's easy to find fault, yet elimination eventually owed more to trying too hard, rather than lack of commitment, and resilient opponents who refused to lay down and die. It was easy to see why Saints are Southern Isles Champions, with their outstanding performer of the game, Angus Campbell, regularly picking open the Carloway back-line; "Wee Man" reminding Arsène Wenger what Patrick Vieira was like at his peak, and the Blues' old friend Archie illustrating what Denis Law could do in his heyday, especially as the game progressed and na Gormaich's back-line slowly lost shape as they attempted to re-inforce the midfield and attack. However, this last is understandable, as "Pongo", Seumas, and Domhnall simply attempted to create what was not being created in front of them, with "D.I" remaining faultless on the left in full Giacinto Facchetti mode.

"Dokus" and "Gochan" at first were unable to grab the pace, but once tuned in, ran and ran, providers *par excellence*, plus Scott Macaulay rolled Steve Chalmers. Don Kichenbrand, and Colin Stein into one, with his endless running/holding/laying-off/striking to justify Select selection. Perhaps he's aiming too low. Maybe Craig Levein should invite him *tout de suite* to the U.S.A.; Archie and Dan would help out too.

The midfield was the problem, distorting the team framework, drawing "Gochan" and "Dokus" back and Mackay, Macleod, and "Pongo" forward, as Dan Crossley, who obviously changes into his Superman outfit in telephone kiosks before slipping on his team kit, ran/tackled/laid off/defence-splitted/dead-balled/shot and generally spread himself around. Only the arrival of the class support of the Blues' own Xavi, Donnie Macphail, later in the game spread the load, but by then the contest was in irreversible-mode.

Remember, Carloway played well, but then so did lochdar, and as "Highlander" stated, "*There can only be one!*" winner. So, no mainland jaunts this year for the Blues. We can only hope the Saints get a kind draw in the next round, not the likes of Avoch or Pentland United, to get into the mood of the tournament. Best of luck to the boys of lochdar! Carry the primrose flag!

lochdar Saints Man of the Match: Number 11 Angus Campbell (sorry Archie).
Carloway Man of the Match: Dan Crossley.

Penalties:

Domhnall Mackay	1-0	1-1
Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald	2-1	2-2
Dan Crossley	3-2	3-3
Scott Macaulay	X 3-3	3-4
Kevin "Gochan" Macleod	4-4	4-5