

Eilean an Fhraoich Cup Semi-Final Leg 2:

**Ness 1 (1)**

*Andrew "Bubble" Macleod 4*

**Carloway 4 (1) Aggregate: 3-5.**

*Domhnall Mackay 45+2 (pen.)*

*Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald 74*

*Dan Crossley 79*

*Calum Iain Macdonald 90+1*

*At Fivepenny.*

*Monday, 30.7.12.*

*Ref.: George Macaskill*

*Gordon Craigie*

*Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Stuart Macdonald Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Donald "D.I."*

*Maclennan*

*Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Donnie Macphail Billy Anderson Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod Dan*

*Crossley*

*Gordon Maclennan*

*Subs.: Calum Iain Macdonald (Donald "D.I." Maclennan) 45; Calum Iain Macleod (Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur) 63; Ben Smith (Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald) 75.*

*Yellow cards: Billy Anderson 75.*

Tonight, Carloway's long and rocky road to that elusive cup success led them to Fivepenny, already the scene of earlier cup misery this season in the Jock Stein. After three dismal defeats, they were now attempting to salvage a floundering EaF campaign against a Ness team which had effectively outplayed them the week before. How much the Niseachs regretted their failure to capitalize on their superiority that night and create clear space between the sides before tonight was debatable, as the tie remained finely balanced and an early goal for the Blues could throw the tie open.

Well, an early goal did feature, but unfortunately for na Gormaich, it happened to be at the wrong end. Kevin Anderson's recent problems had first surfaced after half-time at Col Uarach 10 days before when his midfield had not left the Visitors' dressing room and, despite extensive searching, he had been unable to find them since. This meant that potential leadership and forward drive had devolved to stoppers, Domhnall Mackay and Gus Maciver, burdening them each with two jobs, as there was the small problem of enemy attacks also to deal with. The EaF rules limited the manager's options to solve this problem, as Gus Maciver was ineligible; in addition, Seumas Macleod was unavailable and Andrew "Tago" Maciver injured. So a 4-5-1 formation was retained, with Gordon Craigie and the back four unchanged, and Gordon Maclennan again up front. However, Kevin "Barra" Macneil and Calum "Dola" Morrison dropped from midfield to the bull-pit, to join Calum Iain Macleod, Ben Smith, and former star, Calum Iain Macdonald. Dan Crossley, the midfield dynamo, fit again, came in left for "Dola"; Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald moved right; and old favourite, Billy Anderson, was asked to bring presence and drive to the centre.

No doubt, the manager tried to figure Chris Macdonald's probable game-plan: would he advise his side to have and hold, knowing that the Blues must come at them - what choice did they have? Then seek to break fast and feed ace playmaker, Andrew "Bubble" Macleod, with the long or through ball, and he, in turn, would trick his way forward to convert or set up experienced predator, Murdo "Mojo" Maclean? Certainly, all-out Niseach attack was unlikely, early on, anyway.

The first shock of the evening was the weather: mild, sunny, and WINDLESS! On the field, long-term prediction proved unnecessary, regarding either team's approach the longer the game proceeded goal-less. As expected, Carloway opened full of purpose,

determined to seize the initiative. They held the ball carefully, then pushed. However, after four minutes, on their first real attack, Ness made the mountain that little bit higher. The Blues lost the ball in midfield and Ness broke fast to the right. The cross from 22 metres was weak, but cleared out poorly into the centre, where it was hooked back from 24 metres over the advancing back-line, to be gathered by "Bubble" racing clear into the right of the Carloway box and he wasted no time in firing a low right-foot drive to the left of the helpless Craigie from 16 metres. Not part of the script!

Na Gormaich didn't panic but resumed the patient build-up and tried to stretch Ness: "Dokus" and Crossley keeping wide, suddenly bursting forward; Stuart Macdonald and Domhnall Mackay wasting no opportunity to drive forward; and the combative Anderson imposing his will in the centre. Carloway gained an early grip on possession and their positive forward play, something absent in their last 2½ games, pushed the Niseachs back. Or did the two-goal cushion consciously or subconsciously dictate Ness's approach?

The half-chances came. On 8 minutes a Macphail corner broke out to "Dokus" but his left-foot shot from 16 metres whizzed past "Sweeney's" right-hand post. Four minutes later another Macphail corner on the right reached Mackay at the far post, 10 metres out, but his header thudded against the near-side top of the bar. However, a minute later a Ness corner on the right broke to Jack Dunlop in the centre 18 metres out, but he swiped this rare chance straight at Craigie.

It was 21 minutes before the Blues' next real opportunity arrived, when "Dokus", breaking out of his own half, delivered a glorious Jimmy McIlroy between Innes Macsween and Finn RushTaylor for MacIennan to run clear and into the box, but "Sweeney" was out like a flash and stuck out a right leg as wide as the Minch to block MacIennan's early slip from 18 metres. Patient build-up was not unlocking an excellently-marshalled defence, though there were regular "*near*" things. Another ten minutes elapsed before a magical Crossley run down the left took him to the bye-line past three defenders and inwards, finally sending a low cross across the face of the Ness goal, 12 metres out, but there were no takers. Three minutes later a right-foot diagonal from Macphail moving into the Ness half released "Dokus" but his rapid volley from the edge of the box travelled outside the right-hand post. Then a "Sqweg" free-kick on the right 24 metres out was looped high by a Mackay header towards goal but the keeper won the ball before Crossley could head it.

On 40 minutes "Sqweg" drove over from 20 metres and a minute later a deep "D.I." cross from the left was reverse-headed by MacIennan down to Macphail 16 metres out but his shot zoomed over the bar. In injury-time, down to 10 men with the loss of the injured "D.I.", Na Gormaich suddenly received an unexpected gift from the gods: a cracking defence-splitter from "Tiger",, *à la* Michel Platini, sent MacIennan once more down the right between stopper and back; he reached the bye-line, then cut in, but about ten metres from goal Neil Morrison bundled into him; he went down like Klinsmann, and George Macaskill had no option but to point to the spot. Domhnall Mackay's perfect shoulder-height penalty to "Sweeney's" left nearly went through the net.

A few seconds less and Ness would have gone in one-up on the night, two ahead overall. How the second half might have unfolded then is open to conjecture. As it was, the initiative was now with the Blues and Kevin Anderson boldly grasped the nettle: with "D.I." out with what seemed like a season-ending leg injury, instead of a straight replacement with Calum Iain Macleod, a high-risk strategy was adopted. 4-5-1 became 3-5-2: "Tiger" joined Mackay in central defence; "Bubble" moved forward to join Anderson as twin shield; Crossley lay deeper on the left; and Calum Iain Macdonald joined MacIennan up front leftish, with the United man moving more to the right. Dangerous tactics, with fast-breaking troublemakers, Macleod in the centre and Dunlop

on the left. Also, a more direct approach was employed, less work on the ball at the back and in midfield, with more exploitation of the direct pass long, over the defence, for the attack to use their pace, or Ross Hall-type diagonals inside the backs.

On 52 minutes a Mackay charge down the left saw such a ball free the roaming "Dokus" to run in leftish into the box but his drive from 16 metres was blocked by "Sweeney" low at the near post. However, a minute later "Mojo" escaped down the left but his rising shot from 20 metres cleared the bar. Matters deteriorated further for Na Gormaich on the hour with the loss of "Tiger" with a bone-crushing leg injury, so Calum Iain "Doune" was a straight substitute left of Mackay. Before the Blues had settled, a Ness burst was scrambled away untidily on the left for a corner; from this a Niseach head connected 12 metres out left, and Crossley somehow managed to reach back at the left-hand post to hook the ball off the goal-line. It came out to Micheil Russell-Smith 20 metres out; he let it bounce, then thwacked it as hard as he could but it soared two metres past Craigie's left-hand post into Sutherland.

The game was entering a crucial stage: Carloway still had the balance of possession and play but Ness were breaking at pace and dangerously. It was wide-open at this point. On 65 minutes a Macphail corner on the right was reverse-headed across goal by Mackay by "Sweeney's" right-hand post from 14 metres, but no one could connect in a crowded box. After 73 minutes a Mackay free-kick from the halfway line was met by "Dokus" 18 metres out but "Sweeney" responded well.

The frenetic five minutes that followed settled the tie: another Carloway push on the left saw Calum Iain Macdonald send the golden defence-wrecker between right-back and stopper for "Dokus" to outpace the back-men, carry into the box, side-step the helpless "Sweeney" to his right, and thump it into the nearside roof of the net from 12 metres to ensure he beat the defender arriving on the goal-line. Immediately he joined the wounded and the pacy Ben Smith came on up front to lie to the right. It was brutal *fin de siècle* stuff now as each team tried to finish it. A Ness break broke down on the left of the Carloway box; the ball was whipped forward over the defence but Taylor(?) managed to scramble it away for a corner on the Blues' right. An exquisite left-foot Macphail corner swung in, dipping low into "Sweeney's" feet on the goal-line; the keeper reacted instinctively to kick it out, but the unmarked Crossley, 6 metres out, gave him no chance with the rebound.

It wasn't quite over: on 87 minutes the Niseachs travelled left and a high swinging cross, 24 metres out on the line, was met by Neil Morrison to loop a header goalwards from just inside the box. Craigie seemed to lose it in the bright sun-light but it dropped just over the centre of the bar. It was the men from the North's last real chance and the *coup de grâce* came a minute into injury-time when yet another fast Blues' break on the right saw MacIennan get past Taylor to sweep a low cross from the touchline 20 metres out across the box where Macdonald, ghosting in front of his marker, thundered a right-foot shot from 16 metres high past "Sweeney's" right shoulder and home.

In the end Carloway recorded a hard-earned victory, due to their perseverance and willingness to adapt formation and style to rapidly-changing circumstances. It was quite a second half here at Fivepenny, with each side close to settling the score, before the 74th minute strike. Even then, Neil Morrison's header seemed to defy gravity by dropping over.

What side Na Gormaich will be able to put out on the 10<sup>th</sup> versus West Side is open to conjecture, as "D.I." and "Tiger" are likely to be out for the season and "Dokus" and Dan Crossley left the field not fully-fit. Certainly the return of Crossley, especially, galvanized the midfield, though Billy Anderson's contribution must not be minimised, using his experience to control the central midfield with his powerful tackling and drive; a one-man force of gravity to deny the Niseachs through the middle. Whether or not this

was the reason Ness seemed a shadow of the side that performed at Cnoc a' Choilich is difficult to assess, but "Bubble" was certainly more peripheral here, driven wide to contribute, though still causing frequent headaches for the Blues, and the pace of Dunlop remained unexploited till the last half-hour, after "Tiger's" move centrally and eventual departure. The presence of Anderson gave Domhnall Mackay space to deliver a captain's performance and push his troops forward, but the main contrast with last Monday was the positive Blues' approach in midfield with every man contributing for 90+ minutes, tackling back, winning the ball, delivering forward fast, and this pressured the Niseach back-line, challenged their pace, and occupied Neil Morrison, Taylor, etc. as they had not done in the first leg so that the Niseach attack had less ammunition to fire.

Ness Man of the Match: Neil Morrison.

Carloway man of the Match: Domhnall Mackay.