

Coop Cup Round 2:

## Carloway 2 (1) Lochs 0 (0)

Andrew "Tago" Maciver 5,  
Kenny "Wellies" Macaskill 46

At Cnoc a' Choilich

Monday, 3.8.12.

Ref.: Stuart Macleod (Shawbost).

David Beaton

Calum Tom Moody Gus Maciver Domhnall Mackay(capt.) Kenny "Wellies" Macaskill

Andrew "Tago" Maciver ☒ Billy Anderson ☒ Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod Dan Crossley Ali "Tolsta" Maciver

Kevin "Gochan" Macleod ☒

Subs.: Kevin "Barra" Macneil ☒ (Dan Crossley) 70; Ben Smith (Billy Anderson) 90; Calum Iain Macleod (Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod) 90.

Yellow cards: Kevin "Barra" Macneil 75; Kevin "Gochan" Macleod 78; Billy Anderson 85.

Red card: Andrew "Tago" Maciver 86.

After Friday's unexpected joy at Fivepenny, the next unwelcome problem on the horizon for the Blues was the intimidating presence of League leaders, Lochs, at Cnoc a' Choilich, in what increasingly seems this season like a regular monthly confrontation. Coming into this, the men from Leurbost led 2-1, having won twice in the League, 2-1 at home, 1-0 away, but losing 0-2 in the Jock Stein in Carloway. The games have not followed a pattern: in April, Jim O'Donnell had touched home early in a rampant Lochs' first half performance, yet his team had curiously died in the second but still managed to grind out the hard-earned victory. However, five weeks later, at Cnoc a' Choilich once more, two quality sides proved to be unremittingly inventive and aggressive throughout, with outstanding individual displays from the Mackenzies, Peter and Peter Robbie, David Macmillan, "Dokus", "Gochan", Dan Crossley, and the man the Carloway boys love to hate: "Nomie". Until the whistle blew in the 95th minute, the result had remained in doubt.

Yet, the earth was to turn again in June: against a weakened Maroons' side, the Blues managed to dominate possession and territory, squander what few chances they created, then lose two late goals to hurtle to defeat. It wasn't just their strips that were blue after that! Tonight, once more, an unusual Lochs' side trotted out: was it 3-5-2, or 3-4-3? Cameron Houston was in goal; Ally and Peter Mackenzie were joined by Chris Mackay at the back; David Macmillan in charge of the engine room; Roddy Morrison *trequartista*; Callum Masson right wing, Gordon Craigie leading; but no Graeme, Peter Robbie or Robert Mackenzie, Angie Campbell, "Lava", or - to the relief of na Gormaich, no doubt - "Nomie".

Carloway had to dig deep themselves to cover the cracks: with Donald "D.I." MacIannan and Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald joining the army of injured, and Seumas Macleod and Donnie Macphail unavailable, the fiery cross had been sent to Achmore to summon the return of stalwart Calum Tom Moody at right-back, and Kenny "Wellies" MacAskill was let out of the cupboard to make his first appearance since 2003, on the opposite flank. Andrew "Tago" Maciver and Dan Crossley were

risked in midfield; Ali "Tolsta" Maciver recalled left; and Billy Anderson, after his eye-opening display in Ness, continued beside Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod, behind Kevin "Gochan" Macleod, in what looked like a 4-5-1 formation. Lochs' preference for a back three looked justified then, although the Carloway game-plan repeatedly changed throughout, according to circumstance. Mind you, so did Lochs'.

And so, into battle - at times, literally! Clearly, these contests have become more than just "games". The June defeat still rankled down Carloway way - a lost opportunity, in their view, to damage the League pretensions of **THE** team on the island; while the Lochies in turn wished to smack down the likes of Carloway, Back, Athletic, etc., pretenders to their crown; many personal contests here also, bragging rights, and so on: Domhnall v. Peter; Dan v. David; "Pongo" v. Ally; seen clearly later on, when Gus and Roddy wished each other well, nose-to-nose, rather loudly! On a mild, sunny evening, in front of the customary huge crowd, George Spy once more had Cnoc a' Choilich as art-form, resembling Wembley, as the predictable frenetic sparring began.

Carloway quickly returned to old habits: an explosive opener. Neither side, nor the game, had settled into a pattern before Crossley was sent clear on the right to outpace his marker to the bye-line, catch the ball, and turn inwards to goal. He released a low cut-back from 16 metres and the arriving "Pongo" beat the Mackenzies and "Gochan" to smash it low past a helpless Houston from 8 metres.

Whether this caused the Blues to subconsciously relax, or Lochs reacted by moving up a gear, a period of sustained Lochs pressure ensued. On 9 minutes a Macmillan free-kick from the halfway line carried a shade too high for Peter Mackenzie past Beaton's left-hand post, though a Carloway thrust leftwards saw "Pongo" send "Gochan" clear, continue inwards to receive his square cut-back from 16 metres, then be blocked superbly in front of goal by Ally Mackenzie. Straightaway, Lochs surged downfield but the attack foundered in the box; the ball was cleared to the Blues' left, then fired back in from 24 metres, caught Anderson's head and flew backwards over the advancing back-line to a Lochs' man, 16 metres out, leftish, to sweep home low to Beaton's left. Offside was flagged!

Four minutes later a free-kick 24 metres out in the centre gave dead-ball king, Macmillan, a chance to calibrate his sights but his drive flew well-over. The dogged nature of the game was restricting opportunities. Under pressure or by design - four big men at the back; "Pongo" and Anderson in front of them - na Gormaich repeatedly drifted back, defending like granite in the centre, counting on the ingenuity of Crossley and the tenacity of "Sqweg" or "Tolsta" to release "Gochan" and "Pongo" bursting forward; while the elusive Macmillan directed the middle of the park, Morrison in front of him supporting his Wiltord-type twisting and turning to seek the breach, but being repeatedly forced wide to set up the cross behind the line. The direct route to goal, the golden defence-splitter, was continually denied in a penalty-box at times as crowded as downtown New York.

On 23 minutes a Crossley corner on the right short to Mackay saw his chip from 20 metres met by Moody, 14 metres out, but his header at Houston lacked power. On the half-hour Beaton had to move sharply to his left to punch a cross/shot clear from under his bar. Then a sudden move through the middle saw "Sqweg" moving into

Lochs' territory to find "Pongo" and he in turn supplied "Gochan", but his shot from 20 metres went well-over. On 35 minutes Lochs broke at pace on the left, and a sweeping diagonal cross-field move from the halfway line dragged the Blues' defence right; the ball came to Macmillan in the centre and his early lay-off freed the unmarked Masson beautifully to move into the right-hand corner of the box, but as Beaton advanced, he pulled his right-foot shot wide of the far post.

An engrossing first half had presented contrasting strategies. Lochs at times had performed an excellent impression of Carloway's regular approach: live dangerously at the back, as the high back-line and midfield adopt Michels' *totaalvoetbal* tactics, led by a central *animateur*, in this case Macmillan, passing the ball rapidly back and forth, eternally changing direction and places, confident that an opening must come; but with a defence as immovable as the Great Wall, adopting zonal, rather than man-, marking, it doesn't necessarily follow. Liechtenstein, San Marino, and Andorra do it all the time. But they don't have players like Crossley, "Pongo", and "Gochan" ever-ready to break, cleverly, at pace, to turn the knife.

Whatever Roy Shirkie advised over the half-time oranges, however, received an immediate set-back. A trademark Crossley corner on the right witnessed the Blues' own Roberto Baggio send the sweetest of left-foot in-swingers over Houston and a massed defence to the far post where "Wellies", slightly non-plussed by "Gochan" beside him 6 metres out, mistimed his header but saw the ball strike his left shoulder, and bounce down and into the unguarded net. Lochs had had most of the play, but two early strikes had given Carloway the initiative. There was no real need to do a Ranieri, yet na Gormaich continued to juggle positions, becoming 3-5-2, with the captain joining right midfield and "Pongo" aiding the tireless "Gochan"; even Anderson crept slightly forward and roved. In their turn, the Lochies went for broke; as well losing a cup-tie 6-0 as 2-0, with Peter Mackenzie becoming active in midfield to abet the irrepressible Macmillan. A plethora of chances, for both sides, naturally appeared.

On 51 minutes an almighty Anderson diagonal from the left touchline found Crossley racing into the box on the right but the Lochs' captain miraculously got back to force him wide and out. Immediately at the other end a through pass finally found O'Donnell(?) gliding into the box but a magnificent "Wellies" tackle robbed him of the ball. On 56 minutes Crossley shot over centrally from 24 metres, before a "Gochan" cross from the left on the hour just carried too high for the arriving "Pongo" and Anderson. Two minutes later a catastrophically misplaced pass left Crossley free on the right edge of the box to settle proceedings; he reacted instinctively by lifting the ball over the rushing Houston but it cleared the far post. On 69 minutes Peter Mackenzie forced his way down left, checked, then passed square to the near edge of the box, but the low shot, through a defender's legs, was spotted at the last moment by an unsighted Beaton, low to his right. Next, the keeper reacted swiftly after 75 minutes, to tip a Macmillan free-kick from 22 metres over the bar.

It was now all-or-nothing from the Maroons, as Carloway retreated further and further, cleared the ball long, and generally frustrated/blocked - by any means. Tempers rose; Stuart Macleod had to keep sharpening his pencil. A clear sight of goal was still being denied to Lochs, and better openings kept occurring for the breaking team - as they always do. On 78 minutes "Pongo" broke down the right,

but Ally Mackenzie recovered like lightning to block "Gochan's" attempted connect 16 metres from goal. Then, on 84 minutes, a long ball sent "Gochan" through, right of centre, into the box; he admired his surroundings, let Houston move out to him, then pulled his low shot past the far post.

Right on time, a pin-ball fracas in the Carloway box - there were quite a few in the closing minutes - saw the ball rebound out to the edge of the box; the return shot was beating Beaton to his right, but cannoned off a Lochs attacker's back and off to the right!!! Lady Fortune had certainly deserted the Lochies!

*Abair blàr!* A Roman emperor in the Colosseum would definitely have given this the thumbs-up! Regardless of the result, both captains must have been proud of their teams' performances tonight, as, like medieval kings, they led their troops by example, into a remorselessly physical, at times brutal, collision, regularly illuminated by flashes of brilliance from Dan Crossley and David Macmillan, who endlessly tried to pick their way through adamantine oppositions. How much of these displays were planned, or forced on them by circumstance, is difficult to judge, but Lochs (relentlessly described lately as "*past their prime*"; "*a shadow of their former selves*", etc., usually by people from Coll) played like deserved League leaders, despite major absences.

David Macmillan, Ally and Peter Mackenzie, Roddy Morrison - all played as well as they have ever done; the only item missing was a Gigi Riva up front, but then, every team's looking for one - or two - of them. That's why they cost €30 million. The artistry of a David Martin would not have gone amiss either, though how much room even a Van Persie or a Lewandowski would have found inside the Carloway box tonight is debatable, with Gus Maciver meeting head-on everything alien and animate, and Moody, Macaskill, Mackay, and "Tago" making sure the threat was stone dead, six inches underfoot. The overall pace of the game was draining to watch also; goodness knows what it was like for the players, although it certainly saw tired muscles later on on Billy Anderson (what an injection of life he has been!) and "Pongo", unluckily red-carded, though "Gochan", the Mackenzies, the big men at the Blues' back, and Roddy Morrison seemed to complete their parts in the drama on full tanks. Bet they slept well on Friday night. Thank goodness next day was a Saturday!

**Lochs** Man of the Match: Peter Mackenzie.

**Carloway** Man of the Match: Domhnall Mackay.