

Coop Cup Semi-Final:

Point 1 (1) Carloway 2 (1)

Alan Macmillan 13

Billy Anderson 31

Dan Crossley 68

At Garrabost.

Friday, 17.8.12.

Ref.: Robert Mackay.

David Beaton

Calum Tom Moody Gus Maciver Donald "D.I." MacIennan

Andrew "Tago" Maciver Billy Anderson 🟡 Kenny "Beag" MacIennan Donnie Macphail

Dan Crossley

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Kevin "Gochan" Macleod (capt.)

Yellow card: Billy Anderson 81.

In Monica Ali's "Brick Lane", Nazreen, the Bangladeshi heroine married to a London-based fantasist twice her age, realises eventually that she can't spend the rest of her life, surveying her unfulfilling life. She has to accept what she has and live her life as it is; she has no choice. Endurance is the key, not self-pity. Likewise, the Blues, after yet another trip to Hell last Friday, faced a difficult end of season in terms of motivation. What choices faced them? Stay disgruntled, fiddle about and continue as a mid-table Stoke City nonentity, losing the odd Cup final? Resign themselves to continued failure, collectively retire, or move on individually? Or go back to the draft board and, like Dave Koz, "Start All Over Again"?

Their dilemma mirrored Nazreen's; their choice had to be the same. In sport, like life itself, you simply endure. The Coop and Moldova Lewis Cups beckoned, final chances to end an unfulfilling season with at least some touch of the glory which, so far, has remained as elusive as gossamer. An awkward assignment faced them tonight, against a Point side who had triumphed at Cnoc a' Choilich only three weeks before on League duty, with two first-half goals from Andie Murray and Ali Maciver that the Carloway defence would prefer to forget.

Garrabost has been a field of mixed fortunes lately. Earlier this season, a competent, efficient Blues had ground out a worthy 2-0 League victory against difficult opposition. The season before they had come back from the dead, 0-2 down, to score five; yet the Rubhachs had revenged themselves twice later that year, effectively ending na Gormaich's League aspirations, 4-3, in Carloway, only a few days after coming back themselves from 0-2 to knock the Blues out of the Lewis, 3-2, at Garrabost, in a bad-tempered contest riven by controversy.

Only Scott Macaulay (broken bone, but NOT ligament damage, which, apparently, is *good* news) and Gordon "Tago" Macdonald remained on the injured list. However, unavailable tonight were Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod (on holiday), Domhnall Mackay (wedding in Bernera), and Seumas Macleod (his father's leaving party in Carloway). 3-5-2 was preferred, with the much-missed Calum Tom Moody joining Gus Maciver and "D.I." at the back; an

imposing midfield of "Tago", Anderson, Kenny "Beag", Macphail, and Crossley; and "Dokus" leading beside "Gochan", handed the captaincy tonight, no doubt to encourage another of these special "*displays*" he seems to reserve for confrontations with the Rubhachs!

Lewis's finest, Daniel MacIennan, was between the sticks for Point, behind a three-man defence - Iain Mackenzie, Stuart Flower, and Cameron Ross, with playmaker, "Rab" Maciver accompanied in midfield by Alistair Gillies, the latter in the Makalele role, no doubt as counterpoint to Billy Anderson and "Pongo". Twin pains in the neck, Andie Murray and Alan Macmillan, led, with Andy Maciver on the left, in what looked like a 3-4-3 formation.

A pleasant evening in Point (what was it like in Carloway, Eric?) with a breeze, though colder than of late, saw Point have the first shot in anger after 2 minutes, a left-foot Murray drive from 22 metres centrally a metre over Beaton's bar. Both sides struggled initially with close control on the bumpy pitch. Gradually, however, the power play of Anderson and "Tago", plus the extra man, enabled the Blues to gain an edge in midfield, and the pace of Dan Crossley, "Gochan", and "Dokus" started to trouble the back men, especially when Anderson had calibrated his sights, and began to deliver his trademark high diagonals rightish between stopper and wing-back, or over the latter's head for "Dokus" to scamper on to.

On 11 minutes a Charlie Gallagher special from Kenny "Beag" through the line sent "Gochan" free into the box on the right but MacIennan raced out to make himself big and the striker curled it low around the far post. Two minutes later came an unexpected shock for the Blues. Point broke down the left into the space behind "Pongo". Moody and Maciver were tugged rightish to cover, but the ball was whipped across waist-high, slightly behind Macmillan on the 18-metre line, and the Rubhach did excellently well to turn back to it, then hook the ball high into the net to Beaton's right.

Billy Anderson replied with a trademark de Boer release of "Dokus" on the right. His cross, 10 metres from the bye-line, came back to him, as did his second attempt. He turned back and sent in a beautiful left-foot dipper which "Gochan" was first to on the penalty spot but was unable to control and his header went straight up. Moments later the captain himself raced down the other wing, but his bullet cut-back low from the bye-line was stabbed past the near post by Crossley from 16 metres. On 25 minutes a Macphail flick gave "Gochan" a clear view of goal, 14 metres out to the right, but his strike touched the outside of the far post and went wide.

Point were wobbling dangerously at this stage, surviving only due to a world-class goalkeeping display from MacIennan, as "Gochan", Crossley, and "Dokus" repeatedly spread and ran, supplied by a dominant half-back line which was engulfing Gillies *et al.* On 27 minutes "D.I." turned back to send in a right-foot diagonal to "Gochan" behind Mackenzie but the keeper read him, and made a stunning block to his right, 14 metres out of goal. A minute later, he got down low to his right to push a Crossley attempt from the left 18-metre line round the post.

Finally, after 31 minutes, after another superlative stop to his right from "Dokus", 16 metres from the right-side of goal, Anderson forced the rebound home inside Point's right-hand post. A minute later Kenny "Beag" set up "Gochan" through the middle but his 18 metre-shot crept past MacIennan's left-hand post.

One-way traffic continued to the interval. On 39 minutes "Dokus" was sent down the right, then cut back and in, but his 16-metre curler went past the keeper's right-hand post, and just on the break a Crossley attempt from 16 metres off a diagonal "Pongo" cross from the right was blocked for a corner.

Willie Macaulay and Alex Wright ("Stoodie" was repainting the stand) faced the tiger: what looked like 4-4-2 was adopted. Lack of pace at the back was costing them. Cameron Ross was sacrificed; Iain Mackenzie moved left on "Dokus"; Alistair Gillies dropped back beside Stuart Flower to counter "Gochan", and David Murray came in on the right to block Crossley advances. It half-worked. Immediately a chance arrived for Point. A snap shot from the left corner of the box forced Beaton to push the ball away exquisitely to his right, but Macmillan(?) got the rebound to the bye-line and his quick-fire square ball across goal was whipped away by Maciver, inches in front of the charging Murray. The ball was returned, this time high from the right, and Beaton had to move rapidly to tip it over the bar, then tip the resultant corner off to his left.

A more even contest was unfolding. On 55 minutes MacIennan on the edge of his box miscued an attempted clearance and "Gochan" chased the spinning ball to the right bye-line, then cut it back to "Dokus" 18 metres out in front of goal, yet the keeper recovered brilliantly to tip it over the bar. A minute later a Carloway clearance was returned smartly over the advancing defence for Macmillan to beat the flag. He moved in, lifted the ball over the approaching keeper from 18 metres, but the ball bounced just outside the Blues' right-hand post. Immediately the same player connected with a cross from the right but his strike went past the same post from 14 metres. On the hour Dan Crossley impersonated Garrincha down the left, leaving defenders in knots behind him, cut in along the 18-metre line, but once more Lev Yashin in the Point goal defied physics to touch the ball away round his left-hand post.

For the next 10 minutes the game was finely balanced, then on 68 minutes, Minerva's scales came down in favour of na Gormaich, due to another moment of magic involving "Gochan" and Crossley. "Gochan" outpaced everyone on the right and cut the ball square along the 18-metre line to Crossley approaching along it. He dragged the ball right, then sent a beautiful right-side-foot daisycutter just out of MacIennan's reach, deep to his left. An absolute peach! It wasn't over!

Three minutes later a long through ball sent Murray in on Beaton one-on-one, but Beaton equalled his counterpart's brilliance by second-guessing Murray's attempt from 16 metres to his right. Immediately Crossley was off again on a

mazy run down the left, then cut in, but sent his effort wide of the far post from 18 metres. Gradually na Gormaich seemed to be surrendering territory, inviting the Rubhachs forward, a dangerous gamble, leading to multiple free-kicks in plum positions. A carefully-placed Andie Murray free-kick in the centre, 22 metres out, flew through the wall but straight to the keeper. "Dokus" did break once more on the right in 79 minutes, tricking his way through and inwards, but his shot from the edge of the box went wide of the Point left-hand post. Two minutes later another Murray free-kick on the left edge of the box shot straight past Beaton's right-hand post.

In the last ten minutes, however, the game fizzled out slowly as Carloway repeatedly show-boated and wasted time outrageously - but legitimately - while lack of inventive penetration dampened the fighting spirit of the Rubhachs who seemed less, rather than more, dangerous as the clock ran down.

Well, victory - of a sort, very much as they have been lately at Garrabost: hard, physical, uncompromising, with several steady performances, underpinning stunning moments of imaginative play from Dan Crossley, "Dokus", and Billy Anderson, and tireless running and ace-chance grabbing from "Gochan", who led by mighty example, as Domhnall Mackay has been doing, for 96 minutes. Probably his most outstanding performance of the season.

Na Gormaich may have enjoyed the balance of play and territory, but Point must regret a failure to capitalise at key moments in the tie. After the initial surge from the Blues, their opener certainly knocked Carloway off-balance; they recovered but a superlative first half performance from Daniel Maclennan, worthy of the Coop Cup itself, together with dedicated resistance from Gillies and Flower, kept them alive, and, indeed, in the opening two minutes of the second half Point could have, perhaps should have, led again. Then Alan Macmillan had a golden opportunity to pressure the Blues before Dan Crossley's Goal of the Season appeared to settle things.

Penalties looked certain when Andie Murray faced David Beaton on 75 minutes, with a chance identical to the one he tucked away at Cnoc a' Choilich last month without blinking. Ah well, such is football. Carloway should have had the game won by half-time, when, in a purple half-hour, they seemed intent on creating the record for unconverted chances created in a single half of the Coop Cup. In this period, "Dokus", "Pongo", and Billy Anderson were irrepressible; Dan Crossley likewise in the second; "Gochan" throughout; with Gus Maciver faultless and Calum Tom Moody oh, so cool at the back. But that final touch escaped them. Yet they endured, got the winner, so the dream is on once more. Perhaps it is darkest before the dawn.

Point Man of the Match: Daniel Maclennan.

Carloway Man of the Match: Kevin "Gochan" Macleod.