

Moldova Lewis Cup Semi-Final:

United 1 Carloway 4 (After extra-time. 1-1 at full-time)

Tom Lawrence 88

Darren Mackinnon 70

Donnie Macphail 102

Kevin "Gochan" Macleod 104, 110.

At Col Uarach.

Wednesday, 29.8.12.

Ref.: Murdo Macaulay (Lochs).

David Beaton

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

Darren Mackinnon Donnie Macphail Andrew "V.P." Macleod Murdo "Sgweg" Macleod

Dan Crossley

Kevin "Gochan" Macleod (capt.)

Subs.: Domhnall Mackay (Andrew "V.P." Macleod) 94; Ben Smith (Dan Crossley) 104; Calum Iain Macleod (Seumas Macleod) 113.

The first item for debate tonight was that the game was taking place at all. Opinion on the terracing was divided over whether the Carloway management should have used the escape-clause for postponement by stating that this was the Wednesday before a Cup Final and this would have allowed their many injured squad members extra days to recover for Saturday's Coop Cup Final and any re-arranged tie. It would also have avoided risking any injury to key players on what was sure to be a rather treacherous surface; and the Blues could have faced an obviously fired-up United, who reach Finals even less often than they do, with the burden of confrontation with the League leaders safely past.

Or was it simply better to get this out of the way, hopefully win, then have five days after their last League game of the season at Ness to recover for a Final clash against West Side? Despite their treatment/absence lists, they did start as favourites tonight to prevail against a side against whom they had recorded two League victories earlier in 2012. The latter, 3-2 at Cnoc a' Choilich, was unlikely to be remembered fondly by David Beaton, controversially dismissed after 28 minutes for a professional foul on Gordon MacIennan, whom he faced tonight. They were 3-0 up at the time but hung on in a pulsating second half for three points. In the reverse fixture it had been the Wasps who had opened the scoring from the penalty spot, but a rampant second half display from na Gormaich delivered victory.

The next item of interest tonight was who would run out on to the pitch dressed in Carloway blue: absent were Andrew "Tago" Maciver (Mission training in Northampton); Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald (ankle injury); and Billy Anderson, Kevin "Barra" Macneil, Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur, Ali "Tolsta" Maciver, Jamie Macdonald, and Kenny "Beag" MacIennan all unavailable. Domhnall Mackay, carrying an ankle injury, remained on a three-man (?) bench, with Ben Smith and Calum Iain Macleod. Surprisingly, the marginally fit Dan Crossley, whom many believed would be wrapped in cotton wool till Saturday, started at left midfield/wing, in what looked like an ultra-cautious 4-

5-1 outfit. A few who missed the West Side League defeat returned: Kevin "Gochan" Macleod up front alone; Seumas Macleod at right-back. This allowed Calum Tom Moody to partner Gus Maciver in central defence, and Darren Mackinnon to move to a preferred spot at right midfield. Andrew "V.P." Macleod's role was unclear at first: was he a holding midfielder, delegated to sink backwards when any of the back four surged forward?

Apparently. United's formation was also difficult to read: was it 4-4-2 or 4-5-1, with Craig Maclean lying deep on the left as midfield/wing, though figures often familiar in Carloway blue featured: Tom Lawrence and Stuart "Bubble" Macdonald in central midfield and Gordon MacIennan up front, the last's younger brother, Jack, between the sticks. No "Gordie" tonight, or the Dunns, off to Oz again.

Carloway were bidding to reach three finals in one season for the first time since 1956, when they went on to win two, the D'Oyly Carte Cup and the Tormod Mór Tankard. Unfortunately, the opening 15 minutes of play proved to be a shapeless yawnfest of broken play, misplaced passing, and lost balls, illuminated by one sparkling run the length of the left field by Crossley, who then cut in along the bye-line, but was crowded out on the 6-metre line by desperate defending. Moments later a neat move freed "Gochan" moving in on the left of the box and Liam Coleman was K.O.'d, bravely blocking his drive.

The Wasps were battling hard in midfield, but the chances favoured the Blues. On 18 minutes a Macphail corner on the United left was headed out leftwards and broke to Seumas Macleod, 12 metres out by the far post, but his shot entered the stratosphere. On 25 minutes another mazy Crossley run from midfield saw him supply "Gochan" on the edge of the box. The striker stepped left of his marker, but his shot landed on the Barvas moor. The pace and skill of Crossley was troubling United, plus the unpredictable movement and running of "Gochan"; and speedy directness and diagonals of Mackinnon. However, when United did win the ball, it was moved swiftly to Macdonald or Lawrence who were establishing a presence in central midfield, and MacIennan, Maclean, etc. broke fast in anticipation, an early-ball approach seemingly alien to the Blues. However, the strong back-line held, the Moody-Maciver nexus especially, and the Wasps chose regularly to move wingwards to exploit na Gormaich's wing-backs' desire to move forward at every opportunity, which in turn left the flank(s) frequently open to counter-attack, which finally arrived on the half-hour, when "Bubble" beat "Sqweg" to the ball in central midfield and burst forward rightwards. "D.I." got back, but stumbled as "Bubble" got to 18 metres from the right bye-line, and whipped a vicious low cross across goal, 10 metres out, but just out of reach of the arriving Maclean.

A minute later Macleod fed the breaking Mackinnon to sweep in a low cross 20 metres out but the connection was blocked for a corner on the right. Mackinnon's corner then cleared the pack to "Gochan" by the far post, 12 metres out, but his shot went straight up once more. On 40 minutes Macdonald, moving through the centre released MacIennan, for once off his

marker, to run to the edge of the box, but his right-footer cleared the bar by a metre. Two minutes later Macleod won the ball in his own half and shot forward, took the wall-pass and reached the bye-line. His nasty cut-back was met by "Gochan" at the near post but his drive from 12 metres was blocked, flew back across goal to Crossley, whose shot in turn was blocked, then scrambled away. However, United almost rewarded Carlway for their catalogue of misses with the classic sucker punch in injury time, when a clearance picked out Craig Maclean moving down the left. From 20 metres out he let fly, the ball thudding off Beaton's right-side junction of bar and post, then down like lightning to swirl back across goal and out for a goal-kick on the far side.

Half-time: United 0 Carlway 0

Kevin Anderson had obviously decided to force the game: the back-line moved high, Moody and Maciver attempted to negate the Macdonald/Lawrence control of central midfield, and Calum Tom to come through. Running the wings was exploited more - Maclennan/Crossley left, Macleod/Mackinnon right - to stretch Coleman, etc. for "Gochan", although Crossley and Macleod repeatedly moved centrally. The danger was lack of cover on the Blues' own flanks.

On 54 minutes a typical Macleod burst forward carried him into the centre to take the wall-pass return but his shot from 16 metres was blocked. Two minutes later a trademark Crossley right-foot free-kick from just inside the United half, on the left touchline, dipped nastily into the Wasps' box. Maclennan came to fist it clear, 8 metres out, but it spun up high and back over his head and the bar. On the hour Macdonald broke into the space on the Carlway left but his low cross found no takers, although Maclean shot narrowly past Beaton's left-hand post from 20 metres two minutes later. On 63 minutes it was Moody's turn to move down the left and his low square cross found "Gochan" on the near corner of the box. He laid it off to "Sqweg" in the centre, but his shot, predictably, was blocked.

As extra-time loomed, what looked like the deciding goal arrived. On 70 minutes a corner on the right was met by Moody at the far post, 8 metres out. His header looped high, then down towards Maclennan's top-left corner. The keeper got his fingertips to it, but as he tumbled to the ground, it escaped his grasp, and Mackinnon, standing by the post, rammed it home. **0-1**.

This heralded a period of intense Blues' pressure to seal victory. Immediately a Mackinnon run down the right and flick came to nothing, before Macleod broke down the right, but "Gochan" nodded his cross down and past from 12 metres. United were wobbling badly as Carlway created chance after chance: a Crossley corner on the right was punched back to him by Maclennan and his return cross ran through to Macphail, 12 metres out on the left, but he skied his effort. A Moody effort from 30 metres whipped just past on Maclennan's right, and then Maciver burst forward through the middle, nutmegged Macdonald, and sent an effort from 20 metres thudded off the top of the left crossbar and over. On 82 minutes a "Gochan" run ended

with a shot just past the left-hand post from 20 metres, before Crossley seemed to beat the entire United defence, one after the other, and send a right-foot shot just outside the far post.

For the last five minutes outrageous time-wasting followed, almost instantly punished when a nasty low cross came in from the United right, eluded Beaton's grasp, then was booted clear by the near post. On 88 minutes came the unscripted line: a disputed free-kick in the centre just outside the Blues' box and Lawrence stepping forward to drill a cracker low past the wall and just inside Beaton's left-hand post. **1-1**.

Full-time: United 1 Carloway 1

Needs must when the devil drives. Two minutes in, a Lawrence drive just over the bar from 16 metres on the left necessitated the arrival of Mackay to bring steel and directness to the centre. A minute later Beaton had to move smartly to cut out a dangerous cross from the right, before Carloway re-asserted themselves, "Gochan" setting up Macleod to run into the box on the right but he pulled his shot wide off the far post from 16 metres. Two minutes later a free-kick on the right, midway into the United Half, was met by Moody's head, 16 metres out, but bounced down off the underside of the bar and was cleared. Immediately it was returned to Crossley, moving into the box on the left. His pass forward broke to Macphail, 10 metres out on the right, to stab home. **1-2**.

Two minutes later Moody won the ball in defence, surged forward, and sent a glorious defence-splitter through the middle for "Gochan" to run on to and drive home to Macleannan's right from 16 metres. **1-3**. By the time Mackinnon ran free down the right, on 110 minutes, to cross head-high for an unmarked "Gochan" to head home from 12 metres (**1-4**), the Cup Final leaflets had already been printed.

4-1 reads a lot more decisive than perhaps it was. In the end it was clear-cut, of course, but Carloway had to earn this victory the hard way against resilient opponents who would not lie down and die. Carloway did control the flow throughout, with the bulk of territory and possession, chances created, but although Macleannan could make no headway through the centre, United had continual creative play in midfield from the inventive Lawrence and dogged resistance and drive from Lawrence and "Bubble", determined to break right or feed the tricky Maclean on the left. And a fearless defence which repeatedly managed to frustrate and block goal-bound efforts - ask Liam Coleman! - assisted by the fact "Gochan" seems unaware there is an offside rule.

The foundation of success, however, lay in the impenetrability of the central stopper duo, Moody and Maciver, which blunted the loss of central midfield to United. This allowed the pace of Mackinnon and Crossley to exploit the flanks and wings and keep the United back-line deep, giving "Gochan" the freedom of the *terquartista* area, the outward 50 % of the United half behind the midfield and before the line. The flaw in this strategy, of course, was the

absence of a dedicated front target man who could finish, e.g. a Scott Macaulay (what a loss he is this coming week!), and this put added pressure on Crossley, "Gochan", and "Dokus" to fulfil that role, and those at the back to leave their slots unguarded and come forward to have a go themselves.

United Man of the Match: Tom Lawrence.

Carlaway Man of the Match: Calum Tom Moody.