

2009 Season Review

Stuart Rankin, 18 September 2009 09:55

Looking at the cold statistics, as Blues' aficionados probably will in the future, this was a successful season for the Blues: a close third in the League for the second year running, with a record points total, and losing finalists in two cups. However, if this was a School Report Card, in the Comments Section at the bottom, the players themselves would probably write, "*Could have done better!*" It's a common feeling, shared by most performing artists, no matter how gifted, that their talents should have resulted in more.

The season started brightly at Goathill with a creditable League draw against Athletic, before April and May witnessed an inexplicable mixture of stunning victories and miserable defeats. Home defeats to Lochs in the League and West Side in the ABC Cup were followed by an incredible 5-4 League victory at Col Uarach, Kenny Beag scoring two crackers in the last six minutes. However, five days later, there was further grief when an unlucky referee call at Daliburgh against Southend contributed to an early exit, 2-3, from the Highland Amateur Cup.

Despite continuing poor League form, in the shape of two defeats, 1-3 at home to United and a crushing 0-5 reverse away to Harris, which effectively ended any thoughts of a serious League challenge, the Jock Stein Cup brought a smile back to Carloway faces. An away victory in Round 1, 4-0 over Athletic, followed by a comfortable 3-1 home defeat of Harris, set up a second amazing victory over the Bacachs, this time at Cnoc a' Choilich in the semi-final. After being outplayed for half an hour and going one behind, Dan Crossley and Kenny MacIennan gave the Blues a half-time lead which they held to the end.

From June onwards, however, na Gormaich's League form suddenly soared, while their cup form plummeted. From June 1st, and a 2-1 victory over Point at Garrabost, right through to defeat, 1-2 to the same team, on 14th August at Cnoc a' Choilich, the Blues were to claim a record-breaking 8 straight League victories which rocketed them to a clear second place in the League, within touching distance of leaders, Lochs. Simultaneously, they experienced two amazing maulings at the hands of Lochs, 0-9 at Leurbost in the Coop Cup and 0-7 at Goathill in the final of the Jock Stein Cup, accompanied by a chastening 1-7 defeat in the first leg of the Eilean an Fhraoich Cup at Barvas.

They did win the return 4-1 to exit this cup with some credit before demolishing United 8-1 at Goathill in Round 2 of the Lewis Cup, then recording, arguably, their greatest victory of the season, 2-1 at Leurbost against Lochs, in the semi-final. A morale-destroying last-minute League defeat on the same ground, 2-3 to Lochs, a week later destroyed hope of a League runners-up spot, but a final League victory, 4-2 at Ness, restored the Blues' confidence for their final game of the season, the Lewis Cup Final at Garrabost against Back. Nevertheless, after initial dominance and an early 2-0 lead, the game drifted away from them and they lost out heavily, 2-5, in extra-time.

Off the pitch, there were three dominant leitmotifs to na Gormaich's season: firstly, an extensive injury list, which only abated slightly towards the end of hostilities; the emergence of exciting new talent in various areas of the field; and a rock-solid consistency of performance and drive among established squad players. Despite the bitterness of some reverses - at Rally Park, at Leurbost and Goathill, and finally, at Garrabost - the boys must be congratulated on their performance and achievement, for themselves and the broader community.

The exigencies of island life, naturally, affect our squad. Most have been unavailable for all or part of the season: Scott Macaulay has still not recovered from injury in Season 2008 and Ross Maciver has been unwell; David Morrison, Phil Macleod, Andrew Rennie, and Chris Macleod work, study, or are training off the island; Alex Smith is about to join them. Donald Chisholm is regularly unavailable for the same reason, while Ross Bremner is only available when his employer sends him to the island. Kevin Savo's and Murdo Sqweg's seasons both ended prematurely because of injury, as did Dan Crossley's after a dreadful tackle in August, at Barvas. Continuing strains affected Kenny Dokus's, Domhnall Mackay's, and Kevin Macleod's availability and a serious injury kept Darren Mackinnon on the sidelines for a lengthy period.

On the plus side, this allowed young stars like DI MacIennan (at left-back), Seumas Macleod (right midfield and attack), and Dan Crossley (attack) to gain regular places in the senior side; David Macleod, Calum Macleod and Calum Fraser made the bench, also. Other squad players, Billy Anderson, Calum Mackay, Andrew VP Macleod, Kevin Anderson and Gordie Mackenzie, have also not been found wanting when the call has come.

Finally, most successful teams at any level are built from the back forward and depend on solid goalkeeping, defending, and, hopefully, a holding midfielder. Our first-choice goalminder, Gordon Craigie, has had his best season in years, with match-winning performances in the Lewis Cup against Lochs and the Jock Stein Cup versus Back, while game after game, our three rocks in central defence - Calum Tom Moody, Andrew Maciver, and Domhnall Mackay have delivered, repeatedly, solid, faultless displays.

Kenny Beag MacIennan is now in the running to be considered the best young midfielder on the island, while we have witnessed the rebirth of Gordon Tago Macdonald on the left midfield/ attack as an incisive goalscorer and assist-provider, with an incredible 17 goals and 12 assists! Particularly memorable strikes occurred against Athletic and Harris in the Jock Stein Cup, West Side in the Eilean an Fhraoich, and Back and Ness in the League, which helped make him, deservedly, the club's top goalscorer.

Of course, none of the above would have been facilitated without the input of a first-rate management team, in Peter Dokus, our Manager, and who also had to absent himself for a significant period in mid-season because of work and training commitments on the mainland; Kevin Anderson, Assistant Manager, and Gordie Mackenzie, Senior Coach, his back-up team and who ran the show during Peter's absence; and Kenny John MacIennan, Fitness Coach, who helped prepare the squad for the new season and also with regular pre-match warm-ups.

So all in all, there was much to be positive about during the season and we all look forward to the 2010 season with great anticipation.