

2010 End of Season Report

Stuart Rankin, 1 November 2010 09:55

Carloway 2010 Season's Report.

On calm reflection, after the heat of battle as it were, the Blues had a moderately successful season: a creditable fourth place in the League, which included a healthy home record of a single defeat in eight outings; a final spot in the Coop Cup after a relentlessly dogged campaign; and a creditable display in the Highland Amateur Cup. Yet the squad, and, of course, their faithful support, most likely will not agree. A sparkling season 2009 set the bar high; anything less inevitably feels like failure, even though such an assessment is inappropriate. Nightmares (like the August night at Goathill versus United) resonate much longer than late spring evenings of glory (as in the Coop victory over Lochs at Cnoc a' Choilich). End of season maulings hang on a team over a close season into the next, while stunning achievement disappears from the tape in weeks. Absence of silverware in a trophy room corrupts memory.

Like most island teams (apart from Lochs!), each March requires extensive regrouping: who has moved on over the winter? Who is still around? Peter "Dokus" Macdonald, as usual, had to rejig – and fast; na Gormaich no longer had Chris Macleod (although he did return for one outstanding game-changing performance, in the game against Lochs) or Alex Smith, while the tour of duty in Lewis was over for explosive front-runner, Ross Bremner; Scott Macaulay was still injured, as was emerging star, Donald "DI" MacIennan; and Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald, Kevin "Gochan" Macleod, and Murdo "Squegg" Macleod were to endure persistent, nagging injuries. Billy Anderson had gone to Back, and in the course of the season, Darren Mackinnon had to seek work off the island, while Calum Macleod donned black and green. Also, work commitments in the latter half of the campaign were to affect Kenny "Beag" MacIennan's availability.

On the plus side, ace striker, Archie Macdonald, came north from lochdar Saints and influential playmaker, Donnie Macphail, west from Athletic; forceful right-sided wing back/ midfielder, Ed Ansell, enlisted, while an experienced left-sided counterpart, Benn Esslemont, arrived mid-season. Our Gneissian backbone – Gordon Craigie, Andrew "Tago" Maciver, Calum "Tom" Moody, Domhnall Mackay, and Gordon "Tago" Macdonald – returned as implacable as ever, and Dan Crossley and Seumas Macleod each took another giant step towards maturity. Squad players like Gordon "Gordy" Mackenzie, Calum Mackay, Andrew "VP" Macleod and Graeme "Windy" Miller answered the call as required, while youngsters like Calum Fraser received further experience; even Assistant Manager, Kevin Anderson, performed latterly, including one game-changing tour de force versus the Bacachs at Carloway in the EaF.

And so the scene was set for an astonishing opening run, covering 12 fixtures from early April to the first week of June, which included eight victories and only one defeat, to an unlucky last-minute winner for Athletic at Goathill in the ABC. Confidence was rampant, a League Championship a viable possibility, and 2009 rarely mentioned, but then, as so often happens in sport, the earth turned slightly – for what reason(s) it is difficult to define: a developing lack of availability of key players? Injuries? Loss of individual or group confidence? Bad luck in defence and/ or attack? Who can say? Probably a combination of all of them. And two consecutive morale-sapping defeats home and away to Back in the Jock Stein and EaF Cups, then an arguably undeserved one to Golspie in the HAC at Culbokie, bred self-doubt through the side. Despite Kevin Anderson defiantly leading the charge for a mini-revival, beginning with a mighty victory against Back in the EaF, various stumbles started to appear, eg. last-minute League defeats at Barvas and Col Uarach, and an inability to close down opposition and translate possession into goals and victory, e.g. at Barvas and, most significantly, in the Coop final against West Side, the last a precursor to the confidence-shattering annihilation versus United. Thankfully, that was the nadir, a cathartic moment (though it seemed like an age), and 2010 was to conclude positively, with a final League stroll against a weakened Athletic at Cnoc a' Choilich

and an aggressive, confidence-affirming second-half display versus Lochs at Leurbost, despite eventual defeat.

The full 2010 squad matched any other on the island, with its Craigie, Moody, "Pongo", Mackay, MacIannan, and "Tago" spine inspiring the side. For the second consecutive season, Gordon Craigie proved himself the best goalkeeper on Lewis, with premium displays throughout, but especially versus West Side and Lochs at Cnoc a' Choilich in the League. Such form was necessary to maintain his place, as his deputy, Gordon "Gordy" Mackenzie, also contributed match-winning performances in two titanic team displays against Lochs and Point, which sent the Blues through the early rounds of the Coop Cup. The big three at the back stood tall in the crucial fixtures and season-long, with the iconic Calum Moody repeatedly carrying the team banner into battle, as defender, midfielder, or striker, while Kenny "Beag" benefitted from the artistry of Donnie Macphail on his right to off-set ballwinner "Sqwegg" on his left. Kenny "Dokus", who started 2010 in outstanding form, and "Gochan", who concluded it likewise, found their creativity hindered by recurrent injury, but this allowed Seumas Macleod and Dan Crossley to establish themselves as regulars, the former providing an astonishing contribution at Lochs in the final game and Dan Crossley several sparkling League displays, at Ness and in the home games versus Back and Athletic, as well as a series of crucial strikes. Ace chance-taker, Archie Macdonald, topped the goalscoring list with Calum Moody, just edging last year's champion, Gordon "Tago" Macdonald, who, however, still remained our most dangerous forward: supplier, creator, scorer, and as exquisite a dead-ball striker (and corner-kick deliverer) as Donnie Macphail.

None of this, of course, would gel without the unsung heroes performing quietly alongside: Ed Ansell, our resolute right wing-back; an enterprising Benn Esslemont at left-back/ left midfield; and stalwart defenders like Calum Mackay, Andrew "VP" Macleod; Darren Mackinnon (what a loss he was!), and the ageless Graeme Miller. Once again, congratulations to Peter Macdonald, the long-suffering manager, and Kevin Anderson, his assistant, for a highly entertaining 2010.