

Stuart Rankin, 16 October 2012 09:09

The End of Season Report:

*"Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer by" these sons of Carloway", And all the clouds that low'r'd upon our house in the deep bosom of the ocean buried".*

Shakespeare might have had the Blues in mind when he wrote these lines, though he would never have been noticed on the anguish-soaked terracings of Cnoc a'Choilich. A sigh as deep as the Mariana Trench circumnavigated the globe around 9 p.m. last September 1st, as Darren MacKinnon slotted the 13th penalty of the long, long night to "Tohan's" right and brought silverware to Cnoc a'Choilich for the first time since the Tursachan were erected. The collective relief down Carloway way had barely abated when a second wave, equally as powerful, followed it the next Friday from Col Uarach, this time as a result of Calum Tom Moody's boot. And so, an unfulfilling season, concluding in less spectacular fashion than those of late, suddenly peaked into THE ONE to enter the history books.

2012 had hardly opened auspiciously: a less than inspiring 0-1 home League defeat to Lochs had been followed by a dispiriting 0-3 thrashing in the ABC at Goathill to Athletic. However, expectations soared moving towards May with four straight League victories, which included a solid 5-1 mauling of reigning Champions, Back, and led into a grinding 2-0 J.S. victory over Lochs, the early-season form team. Nevertheless, a trip to the Uists is always guaranteed to bring out the worst in the Carloway defence and a late May HAC encounter with lochdar Saints demonstrated several textbook methods in how to lose simple goals, usually directly after one thinks one has scored the winner (ending 5-5, with an eventual loss on penalties), and ensured that the 2011 mainland glory run would not be emulated, never mind bettered. Already it seems like something that happened in a previous lifetime. It also initiated another predictable descent into the abyss, with a punchless 1-2 elimination from the J.S. at Ness and less than inspiring League performances at Athletic (an unlucky 2-3 defeat, courtesy of a late Scott Maciver cracker); another *defeat-from-the-jaws-of-victory* reverse at Leurbost, 1-2; and a final-minute gift to Harris at Rally Park, which gave the Hearachs their only League point of the season (3-3). Na Gormaich's mercurial 2012 continued, however, as sunshine returned in July with five straight victories in League and the EaF, but, astonishingly, these were to be the Blues' final League points of the season, as misery was to return with defeats at Back (1-4), and at home to Point (1-2), which combined to ensure there would be no League glory in the West this season, and contributed to another milestone, a League finale of five consecutive defeats.

Yet, even as any League pretensions were ditched, an unprecedented 6-week Cup dream was to unfold for the Blues, in which they were to surprise themselves - and, undoubtedly, their supporters - by recording five straight Cup victories; two more on penalties (in the Coop and Moldova Lewis Cup Finals); and suffer only one solitary defeat in yet another Final, the EaF, 1-2 to the Siarachs, when the old demons briefly surfaced, via perennial bete noire, Scott Maciver, to punish failure to capitalize on an early Anderson wonder-goal.

And all this against a season-long backdrop of a performance-damaging injury-list. The first body-blows were the departure from the island of inspirational wing-back/midfielder, Darren Mackinnon, and the intermittent availability of Andrew "Tago" Maciver, Calum "Cally" Macleod, and Kenny "Beag" MacIennan, the latter two leaving the island later in the season; Archie "Uibhisteach" Macdonald was now permanently south; and injury and fitness damaged the effectiveness of Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald and Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod. Club stalwart, Gordon Craigie, also moved on - to Lochs - as David Beaton was confirmed as No. 1 goalkeeper. To continue Peter "Dokus" Macdonald's excellent groundwork as they had last season, however, Kevin "Mourinho" Anderson and Graeme "Windy" Miller were blessed with the arrival of the island's best stopper, Gus Maciver, from Athletic, enabling them to move Domhnall Mackay right and include Donald "D.I." MacIennan on the left. Ebullient game-changer, Scott Macaulay, was also to re-emerge up front, forming an electric, but all-to-brief, strike partnership with the all-action, Kevin "Gochan" Macleod, and rocketing Scott into the L. & H. Select.

But no sooner had it all gelled once more than it began to unravel: nagging injury was to rule out Calum Tom Moody till those final games of the season while Macaulay and Gordon "Tago" Macdonald were to sustain season-ending injuries. Mackay had to return to the centre, while Seumas Macleod was pulled back right, leaving an enormous hole in midfield, but proving to be a revelation at wing-back. The midfield was wounded, nevertheless. Star playmaker, Dan Crossley; the creative Donnie Macphail and "Dokus"; and ballwinners Ali "Tolsta" Maciver and "Sqweg" still charged, but the experiment did not really fire again till the return of

"Pongo" (who shared the season's goal-scoring honours with "Dokus" and "Gochan") and re-appearance of the aggressive, defence-splitting imagination of Billy Anderson, to unleash the pace and ingenuity of "Dokus" and "Gochan" in attack. Abetted by the squad players, Andrew "V.P." Macleod, Kevin "Barra" Macneil, and David "Cirbhig" Macleod, and emerging talents in Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur (another injury victim), Ben Smith, and Calum Iain "Doune" Macleod, what was finally to occur was to bathe all the above participants in a sea of eternal gratitude and write all their names into the record books forever.

Although the names of those who contributed over recent years to help the Blues reach this pinnacle should not be forgotten either: Gordon "Gordy" Mackenzie, Louis Macdonald, Neil Bowman, "Savo", Chris Macleod, Calum "Hardass" Mackay, Ed Ansell, Ross Bremner, Ross "Tago" Maciver, Phil Macleod, Andrew Rennie, David Morrison, Alex Smith - and on, and on, down the tunnel of the years.

In the Lewis and Harris Managers' Team of the Year, four of the above names were to appear - Andrew "Tago" Maciver, Dan Crossley, Gus Maciver, and Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald. No offence to these players, but why these four? Why not all eleven?