

Eilean an Fhraoich Cup Semi-Final (Leg 1):

Carloway 1 (1) Lochs 4 (1)

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald 2 Peter Mackenzie 8 (pen.); 52 (pen.); 55.
David Macmillan 64

At Cnoc a' Choilich.

Monday, 8.7.13.

Ref.: Murdo Macaulay.

Standside line judge: Allan Iain Macleod.

Farside line judge: Paul Forster.

Jack MacLennan (United)

Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Louis Macdonald (Welfare) Donald "D.I." MacLennan

Dan Crossley Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Stuart "Bubble" Macdonald (Athletic) Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod Phil Macleod

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald I Scott Macaulay

Subs.: Ben Smith (Louis Macdonald) 62; Calum Iain Macdonald (Phil Macleod) 62; Eachainn Miller (Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod) 88.

Subs. not used: Gordon Craigie (Westside); Calum "Dola" Morrison (Ness).

Yellow card: Donald "D.I." MacLennan 58.

Tonight Carloway entered the unique territory of the EaF, the oldest Cup on Lewis, loved by those who cherish tradition, continuity, etc., resented by those who cannot participate, especially fans in or from Laxdale and Newmarket. There are precedents for such competitions. For years, only those born within the old Yorkshire county were eligible to play for Yorkshire County Cricket Club; La Liga's Atlético Bilbao and Real Sociedad football clubs once would only select those born in the Spanish Basque country, but the demands of modern professionalism, lack of available high-quality talent, and EU equality regulations have now put paid to those. However, the EaF rolls on, seemingly forever.

Participation has been, at times, a rather painful experience for the Blues, notably during last August's misery at Fivepenny. A team like Carloway is especially hard-hit by its exigencies: what team could lose Calum Tom Moody, Gus Maciver, Seumas Macleod, Kevin "Gochan" Macleod, and Fraser Macleod and not notice any difference? Especially when their own Mr. Cool is excelling for the opposition. Nevertheless, it was still a surprise to see Calum Tom Moody appearing at all, considering his continuing viral complaint.

An even bigger jaw-dropper was the presence in maroon of persistent Hammer of the Blues, Donald "Nomie" Macdonald, his dual nationality with Harris having been forgotten. Still, elegant midfielder, turned prolific hit-man, Angie Campbell, was ineligible, though the best attacking wing-back and creative midfielder on the Long Island, Peter Mackenzie and David Macmillan respectively, did feature. Their dual presence was to be decisive. Others absent for the Blues were David Beaton, Craig Hacker (both ineligible), Kevin "Barra" Macneill (just off crutches), Billy Anderson (unfit), and Gordon MacLennan (United)(ankle injury). Phil Macleod of Tolsta Chaolais started for the first time in FIVE years; Calum Iain Macdonald was on the island till Wednesday so played; and youngsters like Ben Smith, Eachainn Miller, and Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur came in alongside Ness' Calum "Dola" Morrison and United's 16-year-old Jack MacLennan. Uig boys, ex-Carloway defender, Louis Macdonald, and Stuart "Bubble" Macdonald, now of Athletic, were added to the mix; some Evo-Stick added; the bag shaken a couple of times and, "Abracadabra!" shouted a couple of times; and you have tonight's Carloway Select.

Usually Carloway v. Lochs confrontations resemble battle scenes from "Game of Thrones" but, thankfully, it was rather low-key this evening. Perhaps that was understandable as the large

crowd may have not been able to endure a third sporting contest in the one weekend of extended dramatic intensity, following the final Lions' Test in Melbourne on Saturday morning and yesterday afternoon's duel in the sun between Andy Murray and Novak Djokovic in SW19. Maybe most of the players had been watching also. However, they did treat us to an early example of sublime skill. In only the 2nd minute the Blues broke left for Macaulay to gather, turn, and crash forward at 45° into the centre, only to be brought down two metres outside the central penalty box. "Dokus" stepped up to send the sweetest of Beckhamesque right-footers curling high away from Gordie Mackenzie and into the top-right corner. An absolute peach! (1-0).

It was to be the first of five crackers tonight; unfortunately the next four Mach 10 specials were to whizz past Jack MacLennan, not "Gordie", who had plenty of time to check his Twitter page after this point. "Dokus's" contribution soon turned out to be a rare shaft of sunlight in a valley of gloom, as the unpredictable invention of the timeless "Nomie" and pace of Smith and Maciver increasingly stretched na Gormaich's make-shift defence. Also, an uncertainty about marking and lack of cohesive purpose in midfield allowed aggressive creators like Mackenzie and Macmillan to press.

After 6 minutes a surge on the right broke for a corner which was cleared back out, lifted in again, then knocked out to the left corner of the corner of the box, where a lurking "Nomie" lifted an immediate high side-foot lob to the far post, where it just cleared the bar to land on the roof of the net. Two minutes another push on the right came back out to an advancing Peter "Robbie" Mackenzie, 22 metres from goal to the right, and he returned a delicate flighted ball straight forward for Smith, running across the line, to take high on his chest, and turn, 16 metres from goal, but Louis "Uig" arrived and invited him to take a closer look at the Carloway turf with a strong shoulder charge in the back. There was the usual disclaimer, "*Wha-a-a-at? Me? Foul?*" Not the worst "*tackle*" in the world, but a no-brainer. Peter Mackenzie unleashed an Exocet into MacLennan's bottom right-hand corner. The keeper guessed right, but would have lost a hand if he had touched it (1-1).

On 17 minutes, a mix-up in the Carloway defence permitted Macmillan trickery to make the right bye-line, where his cut-back broke out off MacLennan, then further back off "D.I.", for a Smith pile-driver, from 16 metres, to make MacLennan's right-hand post twang like a bow-string, the ball then ricocheting inwards where another Lochs head somehow managed to loop it over the bar from 8 metres.

The Blues were finding it difficult to move forward as a unit, and it was 25 minutes before force-of-nature, Scott Macaulay, could fashion his own opportunity to turn on the right corner of the box and deliver a left-foot daisy-cutter at goal, but "Gordie" read it safely low to his left. Unexpectedly, Carloway gained a momentum for 10 minutes; on 27 minutes "Dokus" supplied Macaulay on his right but the striker fired over from 16 metres. Then "Gordie" was unable to hold a bending, bouncing "Dokus" free-kick from 24 metres; "Bubble" reacted first to thwack it against the unfortunate keeper, before the ball broke clear. A minute later a Crossley/Macmillan/"Dokus" dogfight, just inside the Leurbost half in the centre, was played right to the unmarked "Tiger", but he also cleared the bar, from 20 metres. On 35 minutes, in what was to be the Blues' last real foray forward of the half, Macaulay reprised his run of the 2nd minute, only for Graeme Mackenzie to earn a booking with his challenge just outside the box. After the customary prolonged protest ("*What foul?*", etc.), "Dokus" hit the wall, then lobbed the rebound forward, where a high tackle earned a second free-kick, this time Macaulay lifting a right-footer a metre over the bar.

MacLennan then held a Macmillan free-kick in the centre from 22 metres, before the half concluded with two astonishing Maroon misses. A "Nomie" free-kick, 12 metres from the left bye-line, saw "Tiger", right in front of his own goal, fail to connect with a backwards clearance

header, but his consequent "dummy" tricked the two attackers behind him as it whizzed head-high past them across goal. Moments later, the two Peters conspired their way down the left and into the box but their finishing drive from 14 metres rocketed across goal and just over the helpless Maclennan's left-hand bar and post.

Half-Time: Carloway 1 Lochs 1

Within the first 10 minutes, this Leg was over. First, Don "Lava" Macleod came on in 49 minutes to honour those present with a real Masterclass of the Lochs "*greats*": Graeme and Peter Mackenzie, David Macmillan, "Nomie", and "Lava". Unfortunately, there was no Andy Murray or David Martin. This served to pressurize a suspect defence further. Three minutes later, Gordon Maciver wriggled past three challenges on the left and into the Carloway half, before turning in and releasing a delightful low curler towards the centre of the box for Smith(?) to glide onto, but as he stepped into the area, a heavy sliding tackle came through him from behind, knocking the ball away, but taking the feet from him also. The referee and line judge looked at each other, and agreed.

A histrionic blue-shirted scrum arm-pointed around the referee. However, Peter Mackenzie remained as cool as Zidane before treating the spectators to a carbon-copy of his first. Again, the young keeper guessed right, but the ball was already rebounding back past him off the back stanchion before he hit the ground (1-2).

Maclennan was still wiping the muck off his gloves when another Mackenzie rocket was passing him at the speed of light into the exact same spot. An unholy defensive mix-up involving a series of attempted clearances eventually ricocheted out towards the right edge of the box where the midfielder reacted instantly to burst forward and claim his hat-trick (1-3).

The Blues' defence was fast losing any shape, and a long ball forward found "Lava" drifting clear of the line to the left, to reverse-head strongly over and past the despairing keeper's left-hand from 12 metres; but he had moved a moment too early, and was flagged offside. A break on the right saw Smith trick "D.I." 12 metres from the bye-line; however, his driven cross arrived too fast for "Lava" to direct his header goalwards at the far post.

On the hour the second in a series of corners forced Maclennan to palm away for a third, leading to desperate measures from the Carloway bench to stabilize the machine, with Ben Smith and Calum Iain Macdonald replacing the tiring Louie Macdonald and Phil Macleod. Domhnall Mackay dropped back to central defence, and "Bubble" assumed a more withdrawn role in front of him. Macdonald tried to support Crossley strongly on the right and "Dokus" pushed forward to support Macaulay, but a lack of co-ordination left Graeme and Peter "Robbie" Mackenzie largely untroubled.

Immediately, "Nomie" set up Mackenzie on the right but his vicious squared ball flew across goal, 12 metres out, without any takers. A minute later, and the wheels really did come off. Yet another series of mishit clearances in the Carloway box led to the ball breaking outwards to the right of the box and this time it was David Macmillan who reacted like lightning to hit the exact same spot as Mackenzie had on Maclennan's back left stanchion - at the same velocity (1-4).

Suspicious were rising that there was a homing device in this stanchion. The tempo now visibly slowed and in the last 20 minutes na Gormaich discovered there was another half on the field and our National Treasure, Gordon "Gordie" Mackenzie, hadn't gone home at half-time. On 71 minutes Macaulay crossed deep from the left touch line, midway within the Lochs half, and found Smith 8 metres out from the far post; he was crowded into playing back to "Dokus" who raced right but his shot from 8 metres was at the sharpest of angles and post and keeper beat it away for a corner. A short corner was returned to Macaulay and his tempting cross was

bulleted past the near post by Crossley. A minute later a Macaulay corner on the left was met by Crossley again, at the near post but his head-flick travelled wide of the far post.

In 78 minutes Carloway's last throw of the dice saw Crossley play forward to "Dokus" on the left; he reversed and from the left touchline, 18 metres from the bye-line, his deep cross picked out "Sqweg" arriving 14 metres from the far post, but it was a shade too high and his desperate header looped lazily over "Gordie" but gave the covering defender plenty of time to retreat and boot the ball into Nitsy's conservatory.

Full-Time: Carloway 1 Lochs 4

It's difficult to decide whether Carloway are happy or disappointed they have to experience another 90 minutes of this torment. Assuming both sides' personnel will be roughly similar next time, it's debatable whether or not they can win next Monday, never mind turn this Semi-Final round. A loose uncertainty in roles, marking, positioning, etc. prevailed throughout, and a lack of pace was exploited mercilessly by Peter Mackenzie, David Macmillan, and Jonathan Smith, especially in the first half-hour of the second half, when the defence played without structure, as if they had first met in the dressing-room, five minutes before kick-off.

In the EaF, a team who can feature their core players close as a unit - Lochs, Westside, for instance - then tack gifted newcomers around them are more likely to prevail. Carloway did have several of their regular gifted contributors tonight: Donald "D.I." MacIennan; Domhnall Mackay; Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod; Dan Crossley; Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald; Scott Macaulay, but for whatever reasons - some were playing in unfamiliar roles/in different positions from normal and the glue was stretched too thinly; they missed those normally beside/in front of/behind them; or whether the absentees are much more fundamental to the Blues' present successful form than the fans already know they are - who can say?

Hopefully, the return of the accepted line-up on Friday at Fivepenny will witness a return to their previous winning ways, and after next Monday in Creagan Dubh, we can simply *"forget and smile"* rather than *"remember and be sad."*

Lochs Man of the Match: Peter Mackenzie.

Carloway Man of the Match: Jack MacIennan.