

Eilean an Fhraoich Semi-Final (Leg 2):

## Lochs 3 (0) Carloway 3 (2) (Aggregate: 7-4)

Donald "Lava" Macleod 63; 90+1. Dan Crossley 13, 39

Domhnall Mackay (o.g.) 65 Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald 56

At Creagan Dubh.

Monday, 15.7.13.

Ref.: Robert Mackay.

Standside line judge: Murdo Macaulay.

Farside line judge: Davie "Spider" Macleod.

Christy Campbell

Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Donald "D.I." MacIennan

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Billy Anderson ☒ Stuart "Bubble" Macdonald (Athletic) Murdo

"Sgweg" Macleod Phil Macleod

Dan Crossley Ben Smith

Subs.: Jack Buchanan (Ben Smith) 72; John Crossley (Phil Macleod) 72; Eachainn Miller (Billy Anderson) 90.

Subs. not used: Louis Macdonald (Rangers S.C.); Calum "Dola" Morrison (Ness).

Yellow card: Billy Anderson 51.

Tonight Carloway tonight had to ask themselves honestly how much mileage they really believed was left in this Semi-Final. Three goals did present quite a gap to overtake and after last week's less than inspiring, if at times minimally unlucky, performance against the Maroons, extensive reconstruction might be required even to prevent further misery. When big decisions go against you, you simply have to grin and bear it; the referee's unlikely to say, "You're right! Let's forget it".

Enforced absences added to the Blues' difficulties: young star, Jack MacIennan, was off island; his brother, Gordon, had at least another week out with injury; and Scott Macaulay's troubling knee problems meant it would be wise to rest him for the Co-op jaunt to Lionacleit to meet Eriskay. Kevin Anderson and Graeme "Windy" Miller dug deep: glaring problems exploited by the Lochies last week had been an uncomfortable looseness in defence and lack of strike-power till late when Dan Crossley assumed a personal role there, and Stuart "Bubble" Macdonald pushed forward in support.

To plug the former, midfield Rock of Gibraltar, Domhnall Mackay, was sacrificed to central defence between young-bloods, Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur and Donald "D.I." MacIennan; "Bubble" now became main spearhead in midfield, flanked by the creativity and imagination of Billy Anderson right and aggression and diagonals of Murdo "Sgweg" left; former star, Phil Macleod, still on the island till Wednesday, started in a form of left wing-back; and Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald charged forward at every opportunity down the right, in an attempt to spread, take on, and beat the Lochs defence with skill and pace; Dan Crossley did the same through the centre and Ben Smith drifted likewise left to spread and run also. Christy Campbell (Tolstachaolais and sometime Lochs) made his début between the sticks, while new stars, Jack Buchanan and Eachainn Miller, made the dug-out, alongside returning favourite, John Crossley; Louis Macdonald (former Blue and ex-United, now

Rangers S.C.); and Calum "Dola" Morrison (ex-United; now of Ness).

The Lochs side presented uncomfortable viewing: Graeme Mackenzie was absent (religious camp), but no, all the usual suspects were there: Peter and Peter Robbie Mackenzie; David Macmillan; Jonathan Smith; Donald "Lava" Macleod, etc.. "Lava" started this week, no doubt to pressurize an unfamiliar Carloway defence, missing one of its fundamental constructs, Calum Tom Moody. As it happened, tonight Moody was central to the opposing team's defences instead, partnering Ali "Koch" Morrison (Athletic), with Peter Robbie more to the right.

A reasonably pleasant evening, with a fair breeze, was to see a fast-moving, open first half. After 3 minutes, an Anderson corner on the right broke out to "Dokus" in the centre, but from 25 metres, his right-foot shot flew a metre over. A midfield diagonal right, behind Macleod, allowed Macmillan through at speed; he checked on 20 metres, then cut in, but his low left-footer went straight to Campbell.

Suddenly, na Gormaich were under pressure: a strong break on the right and deep cross, 15 metres from the bye-line, carried to the far edge where Smith's turn and snap shot had to be beaten away by the keeper to his left for a corner. The corner was blocked out to the right edge of the box; Peter Robbie's return spun away to the right, to be gathered by Smith, tricking his way up the bye-line, round "D.I.", and into the box, only for a falling "D.I." to bring him down. Everyone looked at the referee. No whistle!

The Blues were a little rattled: another Maroon push in 12 minutes caused Carloway's familiar *cattenaccio* under pressure to block three times just inside the box; the ball cannoned off to the right but Smith was once again blocked for a corner.

Then over-confidence at the back brought instant disaster for the Leurbost men: under pressure, 22 metres out in the centre, Peter Robbie tried to Roger Byrne-it left along the line; Crossley stuck out a giant foot; the ball ricocheted off the two of them and spun forward; Mackenzie slipped and Crossley raced forward towards a helpless "Gordie". Twenty metres out, he cracked an early daisycutter which "Gordie" somehow managed to get down on, but its pace and power drove it under him, then carried slowly onwards and just inside Lochs' left-hand post (**0-1**).

A minute later a "Sgweg" free-kick, curled in from 24 metres, out towards the left touch-line, cleared the wall, then dipped so sharply it surprised the keeper, whacking off his shin and out so smartly that Mackay, 8 metres out, had no time to react and knocked the ball along the bar and off to his left. Lochs responded fast with a Peter Robbie free-kick from the halfway line which was knocked rightwards. Smith managed an overhead back across the box to "Lava" but his shot whistled low past Campbell's right-hand post.

On 26 minutes a clever "Nomie" slip from a free-kick 22 metres out towards the left came to Moody on the right edge of the box, to wheel round and drive,

but its sting was deadened by a Carloway boot and Campbell gathered safely. On 34 minutes "Dokus" once again got behind Peter Robbie down the right touch-line, and his vicious dipping cross broke off a threatened Mackenzie, and his name-sake had to thwack it anywhere for a corner.

The sides were well-matched: up front, the pace and directness of Crossley, "Dokus", and Smith; in midfield, the talent and skill of Macmillan, "Nomie", and Anderson and powerful contribution of "Bubble", "Sqweg", and Peter Mackenzie; Moody and Mackay at the back, with "Tiger", "D.I.", and "Koch" papering over any cracks.

On 38 minutes another break by Smith, this time down the left, led to his laying the ball off right, to "Lava" coming forward to the box, but his drive was hooked badly wide of Campbell's right-hand post. Then the stakes rocketed crazily: a long ball out of the Blues' defence was back-headed on by "Bubble", just inside the Leurbost half, and this sent Crossley and "Gordie" into a frantic race to win it. They collided just inside the box, a sliding Crossley ramming it against the diving keeper's chest. As it rebounded, the supine Crossley rammed it with his right foot past the keeper to trickle into the unguarded net (**0-2**).

A frantic Lochs tried to claw one back before the interval: on 41 minutes a right diagonal sent Peter Robbie down the line, behind Macleod and wide of "D.I.". His waist-high cross reverberated off several crashing bodies, 12 metres out in front of goal, before being booted as far as Crossbost over a frenzied chorus of handball claims. At the death, another Lochs break on the left was eventually played along the edge of the box to Macmillan, who took one step left, then powered a cracker inches over the bar.

### **Half-Time: Lochs 0 Carloway 2**

There had been incident aplenty here for spectator and dressing room to ruminate over, with, no doubt, both sides feeling hard-done-by. It was to continue in this vein. Immediately "Bubble" burst forward right-of-centre and delivered a glorious de Boer forward cross-ball right, over a retreating defence, for "Dokus" to break off and behind the line, then trap expertly, turn in, and perform a carbon-copy of Macmillan's with a left-foot sizzler that scorched the top of the bar.

On 53 minutes a Macmillan free-kick in the centre, 22 metres out, led to an almighty melée on Campbell's penalty spot, before the fans were treated to a genuine "*Pale horse*" moment: "*Will it really happen?*" Ben Smith escaped down the left and in towards the bye-line; he doubled back, then re-doubled, before somehow contriving to squeeze it along a 6-metre box as crowded as Glasgow Central towards the far post. Mackenzie was suddenly aware of "Dokus" creeping in and flung himself forward, had the ball rammed against him twice, and then "Dokus" managed to fit the ball into a tiny square at the base of the post (**0-3**).

Unfortunately, Carlowegians only had 7 minutes to relish the moment, as

immediately after "Dokus" had caused Leurbost waters to break with a free-kick just over from 22 metres, two rapid strikes dissolved the dream. Not without controversy, of course! Impossible in a Carloway-Lochs game! On 63 minutes a long ball out of defence sent "Lava" chasing a ball which seemed to be dropping into the rising Campbell's arms safely, 12 metres from goal. The striker arrived as Campbell seemed to be gathering, crashed into him, and as the keeper fell, the ball spun away to the right bye-line. Before he could be tackled, "Lava" caught it and lashed it into the roof of the net (1-3).

No words are adequate to describe what happened next! Carloway protests rose; the flag stayed down. Two minutes calming took place, and then suddenly Jonathan Smith was racing free on the right. Twenty metres from the bye-line and 10 metres in from the touchline, he drove a hard low cross forward across the area. Mackay, racing to beat "Lava" on his far-side to the ball, attempted to flick it on with his left-foot for a corner, only to send it rocketing into Campbell's bottom right-foot corner (2-3).

In the last 20 minutes, a still-competitive game lost its heart slightly, and the passion passed from the Blues' hearts a little. Kevin Anderson gave some of his younger hopes a run - Buchanan, Miller, and John Crossley. On 71 minutes a Lochs corner on the left was knocked on to Peter Mackenzie on the right edge of the box, but his low drive managed to go through everyone, yet wide of the far post. Seven minutes later another break, then high cross, from the left was palmed on by Campbell to Mackenzie on the same post but his instant drive whacked the outside of the goalie's left-hand post and disappeared towards the loch.

On 87 minutes "Lava" topped that by winning the Most Incredible Miss of the Match competition, when a cross from the left appeared to run along the Blues' bar to the right, where the ace hit-man, lurking by the far post, somehow managed to miscue, and send the ball back across the 6-metre box. However, honour was finally satisfied for "Lava" - and Lochs - when a minute into added-on time, a long ball out of central defence saw him ghosting through tired defenders to flick beyond Campbell from 18 metres (3-3).

At least, na Gormaich were spared the misery of last-kick defeat when a conversion by an unmarked attacker wide on the left, 18 metres out, off a hastily-taken free-kick in the centre, was flagged off-side.

**Full-Time: Lochs 3 Carloway 3**

Perhaps not the fairy-tale ending that the men in blue envisaged on the hour, but it was a fine overall performance from a team, rejigged a little, whom many had written off in this Semi-Final after last week's dreary first half-hour in the second half. For much of the game, they competed well with a Lochies side keen to impress on their return to Creagan Dubh. They had ridden their luck a little at times as one must against a side of this quality; but, in turn, they had repeatedly pressured their opponents and frequently had them stretched and threatened.

Their main confidence sprang from the "Tiger"/Mackay/"D.I." back-line, operating in the style of Mourinho's European Inter approach, doubling and redoubling back to defend like mediaeval archers, with no-nonsense first-time clearing to keep the ball away from "Lava", Smith, and "Nomie". "Bubble" and "Sqweg" drove continually on either side of the diagonals of Anderson; but the main thrust, and success, of such aggression was the wide pace employed by Smith and "Dokus", drawing the back-line thin, and allowing the storming runs of Crossley, an early revelation to all at Leurbost, to create regular havoc whenever he came forward.

Of course, in a match that lasts 90-odd minutes, a team that has Peter Mackenzie and David Macmillan in it can never be kept out entirely. By doing everything right as much as possible, you can only hope they don't find the key too often.

**Lochs Man of the Match: David Macmillan.**  
**Carloway Man of the Match: Dan Crossley.**