

Coop Cup Semi-Final:

Carloway 4 (0)

Fraser Macleod 50

Seumas Macleod 63

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald 84, 89

Lochs 5 (2)

Jonathan Smith 23, 46

Donald "Nomie" Macdonald 33

David Macmillan 77

Chris Mackay 80

At Cnoc a' Choilich.

Monday, 29.7.13.

Ref.: Murdo Macaulay.

Standside line judge: Neil Macritchie.

Farside line judge: Paul Forster.

David Beaton

Calum Tom Moody Gus Maciver Donald "D.I." MacIennan

Kevin "Gochan" Macleod ☒ Seumas Macleod Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Billy Anderson

Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Fraser Macleod

Subs.: Dan Crossley (Billy Anderson) 45; Scott Macaulay (Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod) 45;

Kenny "Beag" MacIennan (Fraser Macleod) 83.

Sub. not used: Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur; Ben Smith.

Red card: Kevin "Gochan" Macleod 58.

The best of pals last weekend on the Leverburgh ferry; less so tonight, in what should have been two of the form sides' second encounter over this weekend. However, referees are clearly as precious as creative midfielders on this island, so Mephistopheles didn't enjoy the chance to present the Blues' board with Sophie's choice, "*Him down below will grant you one victory only, in these two games versus Lochs. Which do you choose? Another step to a first League title? Or another Final appearance, to try for a first-ever successful defence of the Cuach a' Choop?*"

Almost as difficult a choice to make as Carloway's desired result tonight at Goathill between Athletic and Westside. What would they be praying for there? A draw? A victory apiece in their two League meetings? Thankfully, no one has that power to decide. Tonight then, a fifth meeting of the season between the Blues and Maroons, with honours so far roughly even.

Back in April, na Gormaich managed to record a comprehensive 4-1 home victory in Round 2 of the ABC, despite a stormy first half, in which they ground out a 3-0 lead, though Domhnall Mackay and Kevin "Gochan" Macleod were invited to leave the proceedings. A fortnight later they went one better, with an astonishing "Gochan"-inspired 5-1 League win at Sgoil nan Loch, before a catastrophic descent into a dismal 180 minutes earlier this month in the EaF against the Maroons. Trounced 1-4 at Cnoc a' Choilich, thanks to a rampant second-half display from the Lochies, the Blues battled to a deserved 3-0 lead on the hour in the return at Creagan Dubh, then barely escaped with a fruitless 3-3 draw, after a controversial "Lava" opener thwarted any chance of a miracle comeback.

Unbeaten since that 1-4 night, indeed only once this season in their "*full*"

sense (the 2-3 loss to Avoch in the HAC 3), Carloway were seeking a fifth straight isles "full" Cup success, with only Kevin "Barra" MacNeil injured, though Scott Macaulay and Dan Crossley carried persistent knee problems which relegated them to the bull-pen with Kenny "Beag" MacIannan, Cameron "Tiger" MacArthur, and Ben Smith. Hence, "Gochan" started right midfield, with Macleod/Mackay/Anderson/"Sqweg" all taking a step left; the rest continued as was, intent on continuing the form manifested in last Monday night's titanic win at Goathill.

An equally in-form Lochs squad lined up: Cameron Houston faced them in goal; the two Peter Mackenzies were stationed in front of him, and an intimidating midfield line featured Lewis's greatest, Andy Murray, the dreaded Donald "Nomie" Macdonald, and perennial hate-figure, David Macmillan; a troublesome front duo began wide: on the right, ball-of-fire, Jonathan Smith, and the elegant Angie Campbell left.

Unfortunately, the opening half didn't quite live up to its billing of, "***Clash of the Titans***". A broken opening 20 minutes saw neither side establish a control or rhythm on play, though the men from Leurbost had more success at setting a pace, holding possession, and gaining territory. On 8 minutes Murray was played down the left and Beaton had to dive back smartly at the near post, as his low cross, 16 metres from the bye-line, took a nasty deflection off Macleod's heel. On 14 minutes a Mackay through ball in the centre was won by Seumas Macleod outside the Lochs' box, on the right, and he travelled square along the line, before disappointing with a low strike into the grass straight to Houston. A minute later "Dokus" broke left from central midfield, carried 10 metres, and then his low, hard centre set up Macleod once more, in the centre, 20 metres out, but his snap strike went up like a balloon.

However, the Maroons' pace and smoother movement were inexorably edging the midfield battle, as Smith and Campbell pulled "D.I." and Moody respectively in, out, and wide, leaving Maciver unsure to cover or hold, mindful of the swirling unpredictability of "Nomie", from whom Thomas Müller learned the exact technique of *Raumdeuter*. Macleod was increasingly dragged off-line as back-up, and Mackay struggled to block playmaker, Macmillan, leaving Murray as *trequartista*, mainly right, to set up the bullets for Smith, mainly, to fire. Anderson and "Sqweg" were lost in the pace, and Fraser Macleod therefore was as lonely as Napoleon on Elba.

The first concerted move of the game, on 23 minutes, realised the opener, with Campbell released into the Blues' half on the left, checking midway, then sending a glorious early diagonal across the near-side retreating line to Smith off his marker on the right, to bring it down expertly with his left, then in one movement *à la* Bergkamp, crack a beauty wide to the helpless Beaton's right from 20 metres (**0-1**).

Na Gormaich were struggling to find a method to counter this offensive. Four minutes later a corner on Beaton's left had to be punched by him under pressure, high and clear to his right, only to be met by a Lochs' head just

inside the box and to loop back over the keeper, where Moody leapt high to head clear under his right bar/post. On 33 minutes Murray was once more free on the left and a hard, low cross came square through a crowded box to be met by "Nomie", 16 metres out in front of goal. He raced diagonal left, and as Beaton dashed at his feet, tricked his way round him leftwards, then cut the ball back in from 10 metres before arriving defenders could intervene (**0-2**).

The game was in danger of spinning away from a wobbling Blues, as three minutes later, a free-kick out of the centre within the Lochs' half, broke out to Campbell on the edge of the Carloway box. His shot was blocked left and "Nomie's" right-foot drive cleared Beaton's left-hand bar by a foot.

On 41 minutes the Blues finally threatened, as Anderson cleared "Dokus" through on Houston's right but as he advanced, Mackenzie produced a astounding block and clearance, 10 metres from goal.

Half-Time: Carloway 0 Lochs 2

At the interval the Home dressing room was unlikely to be the jolliest place on the planet. A recognition by the management that it was the midfield that was not fit for purpose was soon apparent, as Anderson and "Sqweg" enjoyed an early shower, and Macaulay and Crossley were handed the responsibility of kick-starting the machine. Whether they would have worked some magic or not was unrealised by an immediate set-back. Lochs' first attack broke down on the left, 18 metres from the bye-line, and as Moody tried to play the ball clear, he was blocked, the ball played behind him and Campbell broke forward to send the early cross to frustrate Maciver, racing to cover, and "D.I.", already moving forward and left. Smith charged forward unchallenged, into a space the size of Texas, 12 metres out in front of goal, to ram the ball home inside Beaton's right-hand post (**0-3**).

However, before Carloway heads could droop, four minutes later an unexpected gift dropped from the heavens, courtesy of a "Dokus" free-kick, midway within the Lochs' half, 4 metres from the touch-line. A block outwards dropped to Seumas Macleod, leftish and 12 metres from goal; his turn and shot rebounded square along the wall rightwards to the lurking "Fraz Mac", and he obeyed his nature to bang the ball home (**1-3**).

Suddenly the Blues came to life: immediately Fraser Macleod was free on the right, and from the corner flag his high cross was met at the far post by the head of Moody at full stretch, broke out and was blocked; a second drive was blocked, then the ball cleared. On 55 minutes "Fraz Mac" chased the ball at speed down the left, and another high cross, 12 metres from the bye-line, came diagonally outwards to "Dokus" to win by the far post, 16 metres out, but Houston blocked his low attempt to his left superbly, then did even better to force "Gochan's" attempt on the loose ball away for a corner.

Three minutes later, nevertheless, Lady Fortune really turned her back on Carloway: a heavy challenge between "Gochan" and Macmillan midway

within the Lochs' half, on their left touchline, demonstrated clearly each's commitment to the cause. At first it appeared both would be yellow-carded; however, Macmillan was sent away, and "Gochan" engaged in a long chat. Predictably, the card was red, not yellow.

Well, that was that, it seemed. Yet, amazingly, a fired-up Carloway didn't die: on 63 minutes a trademark charge on the left by the irrepressible Maciver ended with a high diagonal into the box being back-headed by Seumas Macleod, amidst a crowded box, high into the net from 12 metres (2-3).

The next 15 minutes witnessed na Gormaich, smarting under a cloak of "*wrongedness*", edge the contest, mainly through effort and commitment. On 66 minutes a "Dokus" piledriver from 22 metres was handled safely by Houston. Four minutes later a Crossley run through the centre took him past three defenders and into the left of the box before firing a low right-footer just outside Houston's right-hand post.

However, the tank was running low and soon force of numbers told on tiring limbs as an experienced Lochs utilized that extra man to play the ball around intelligently, forcing the Blues to run and run. On 77 minutes the extra man was obvious as a Lochs move down the left and into the Carloway half was played into the centre, man-to-man, and on to Macmillan, slightly behind the line and the extra man in space, to move right, come forward, then unleash a right-foot thunderbolt from 22 metres high into Beaton's right-hand corner (2-4).

A minute later a Crossley corner on Houston's right was met by Mackay towards the near post, 12 metres out, but his header slipped wide of the far post. On 80 minutes, the curtain finally came down for na Gormaich when an inviting free-kick wide on the right, midway within the Carloway half, was met by Chris Mackay, leading a line of maroon attackers ghosting behind the defensive line, to head home strongly, directly in front of goal, from 10 metres (2-5).

Incredibly, it wasn't quite over; four minutes later a Carloway surge down the right and into the Lochs' half saw a bustling Macaulay lay forward and out for Seumas Macleod to send a lovely curler forward and into the Leurpost penalty area. "Dokus" materialized from nowhere to win it as it travelled beyond the defence, dummy round Houston to the keeper's left, and side-foot home into the unguarded net from 8 metres (3-5). Jimmy Greaves couldn't have done it more coolly!

Pride seemed to be spurring the Blues on in the final minutes. On 87 minutes another Crossley run into the left of the Lochs' half allowed him to send in a lob-shot from the left corner of the box which Houston had to scramble across and back to touch round the far post. Right at the death Mackay won the ball in the centre circle and supplied the breaking Kenny "Beag", moving into the right of the Lochs' half. Another glorious curler into the Maroons' box saw a repeat of the third goal, as the spinning ball seemed to fox the retreating defenders and the rushing goalie alike and continue on to the lurking "Dokus"

beyond them to register once more, unhindered, from 10 metres (4-5). We always knew that boy would come good!

Full-Time: Carloway 4 Lochs 5

So, an absorbing contest, and any unattached bystander could not complain that he/she did not get his/her money's worth, as the game fluctuated back and forth. A committed fan's opinion might be slightly different however, especially a Carlowegian's. No doubt, the Blues believe they were hard done by, citing "Gochan's" dismissal. Certainly when a group of players catch the referee's eye, he seems always to be the one whose name ends up in the book, or worse.

However, a spectator never knows the full story. Yet the timing and loss of the third goal seemed to be even more fundamental to the final result, although the sending-off, deserved or not, definitely compounded it. Nevertheless, it can't be denied that, in the first half, Carloway simply were not at the races, as the *muchachos*, Andy Murray, "Nomie", and David Macmillan, delivered a masterclass in midfield expertise and control, which rendered their opposite numbers impotent and, at times, well-nigh invisible after the opening 15 minutes. Quality and unique talent never really departs, though age may dilute and conceal them. It was a reminder of what once dominated the island - and deservedly so.

Mystifyingly, pace seemed to be a problem too tonight for the Blues, yet tonight the pace was intermittent compared to the incessant, non-stop conflict versus Athletic, and that had been handled without real concern by the Blues' XI. Thus the elusive "Nomie" supported Smith and Campbell at will, straining the Blues' back trio, one-to-one frequently, delivering a dilemma to them: "*Do we spread or do we mark?*" the latter dangerous when unprotected by a dedicated fourth-man sweeper.

Ignoring the third goal, resulting from a blunder, quality and tactics decided this game, maybe pace too. Strikers can't score if no one provides enough bullets; midfielders/wing-men can't supply the bullets if they are unable to win the ball; and defenders can't clear/ supply the ball if they can't pin down attackers. Tonight Lochs simply did more of such things more often - and faster - than Carloway.

Lochs Man of the Match: Donald "Nomie" Macdonald.
Carloway Man of the Match: Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald.