

Moldova Lewis Cup Semi-Final:

Carloway 2 (2) Athletic 3 (1)

Kevin "Barra" Macneil 4
Billy Anderson 23

Nick "Nuck" Davis 5, 69 (both pens.)
Donnie Macphail 77

At Cnoc a' Choilich.

Monday, 26.8.13.

Ref.: Ewen Macaskill

Standside line judge: David "Spider" Macleod.

Farside line judge: Kenneth "Bugsy" Smith.

David Beaton

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

Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Domhnall Mackay (capt.) ☒ Billy Anderson Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod Kevin "Barra" Macneil

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Fraser Macleod

Subs: Ben Smith (Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur) 53; Jack Buchanan (Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod) 65.

Subs. not used: Colin Maclean; Calum Mackay; Kevin Anderson.

Yellow cards: Donald "D.I." MacIennan 38; Domhnall Mackay 74.

Robert Jones (?)

Donnie "Xavi" Macphail Nicolas "Nuck" Davis Keith Bray ☒ Stuart "Bubble" Macdonald Daniel Macleod

Elliott Rudall Ali "Koch" Morrison Jason Maclean

Colin Macritchie

Yellow card: Keith Bray 90.

A disappointing crowd turned out on a rather unpleasant evening for the final cup tie of this Season at Cnoc a' Choilich. This was to be the fourth and last meeting of the Season between two of **THE** triumvirate of 2013, with the possibility of facing the third, Westside, a week on Saturday in the Final, should they overcome Point at Garrabost. However, unlike their two rivals, the Goathill men still lack silverware. At least the Blues have the League, the ABC, and the JSC to drool over in the Doune Braes' bar this winter, the Siarachs the EaF on proud display in Barvas, but all that commitment, effort, and class from Athletic's gifted squad was still, surprisingly, unrewarded this Season.

Athletic had contributed much onfield in their preceding 270 minutes with Carloway, yet still had walked off empty-handed. Such is sport - and life itself, for that matter. This was their last throw of the dice in what was simply another trophy opportunity for na Gormaich, to go on to add a possible **SIXTH** victory in their *annus mirabilis*. When did the Carloway faithful ever think they would enter such a dream-world? In sport, the aim must always be to stick around as long as possible and if your luck eventually turns, "*enjoy while you can, as the moment shall surely pass*". Who will be next season's *équipe du jour*?

Assessing tonight's rivals' previous fixtures, the scores alone delivered the answer for their contrasting fortunes. Despite having one of the best goalkeepers on the island, a totally on-message list of defenders in Steven Clinton, Ali "Koch" Morrison, Jason Maclean, Ross Macrae, etc. (whatever happened to "Doug" Maciver?), they had still been unable to shut out Fraser Macleod, assisted by Scott Macaulay, Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald, and an incandescent (in every sense!) Kevin "Gochan" Macleod. However, a cast-iron Blues' defensive shell of David Beaton, Calum Tom Moody (when he is not at centre-forward!), Gus Maciver, and Donald "D.I." MacIennan, had denied Athletic completely, including the once-dreaded *bête noire*, Scott Maciver, and new-kid-on-the-block and resident pain-in-the-tonsils, Robert Jones. Apart from that, not a glimmer of light has been visible between these two outstanding elevens throughout 2013. Understanding football is as difficult as reading tea-leaves, another of Cobby's passions.

Tonight the Blues were able to welcome back the Rock of Ages, Domhnall Mackay, hopefully

not over-exerted from honeymoon, in central midfield alongside Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod and Billy Anderson; but fundamental cog-in-the-machine and match-winner, Scott Macaulay, was still ruled out with his recurring knee complaint; Kevin "Gochan" Macleod was completing his suspension this evening, and, unfortunately, Dan Crossley was a late call-off with a back injury. However, Kevin "Barra" Macneil had recovered from his ankle injury to replace him at left half/wing, while Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur continued square at right half, with Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald, again, leading beside Fraser Macleod. Athletic were depleted also, with both Clintons missing, Steven having dislocated his shoulder in Round 2 at Creagan Dubh, and Scott Maciver, of course, was out for the Season. This entailed Elliot Rudall moving backwards, to partner Ali "Koch" Morrison and Jason Maclean, with dangerman, Robert Jones, lurking deep at inside-right.

A strong west-sou'westerly gave Carloway initial impetus towards Macritchie and they took an unexpected lead after four minutes. Their first attack down the left freed "Barra" midway within the Aths' half, just in from the touchline, and he relayed the ball early inwards to the racing "Dokus", moving into the left of the box. He checked and spun, but his fierce right-footer was deflected high over the bar. Anderson swung in a deep high corner from Macritchie's right and "Barra" coming in by the far post, within the 6-metre box, seemed to connect with his left upper shoulder as he collided with Macleod and both fell, and the ball broke down into the net (1-0). Ah, well, they all count!

The congratulations had barely been completed when a concerted Athletic push into the Blues' box was untidily ping-ponged around the area, broke to Jones 14 metres out on the right, and as he stepped past Moody to the defender's left, the stopper neatly tripped him up. Beaton guessed correctly to his left but over-anticipated and Davis's low, placed shot rolled over his prostrate body and home (1-1). Poetic justice, perhaps, after Fraz Mac's effort against Colin Macritchie in the 2-0 League game here.

After a quarter of an hour, an incisive Jones thrust through the centre saw him lay off a glorious diagonal defence-splitter to his right, but his striker(?), drifting off the end of the line, shot straight at Beaton from the edge of the box. On 17 minutes "Barra" once more broke down the left to lay off early inwards to the surging "Dokus". He made 10 metres from the bye-line and his deep cross found Moody coming in by the far post, 12 metres out, to nod past Macritchie, but the ball struck the outside of the left-hand post and went past.

Six minutes later and na Gormaich went one better when Moody coming forward on a Maciver feed, moved right, and from the centre-line sent "Tiger" free down the right. From the right corner of the box, his early cross found an unmarked Anderson running towards him, 16 metres from goal in the centre, to glance an exquisite header just inside Macritchie's right-hand post (2-1). An absolute peach!

Suddenly the Blues were buzzing: on 25 minutes a "Dokus" turn on the left and snap-shot from 20 metres zipped just outside Athletic's right-hand post. On the half-hour, a double denial marked a turning-point in the half. Another Anderson corner from Aths' right was met by the full force of Moody's forehead, 14 metres out in the centre, but Macritchie somehow got down to block it with his legs on his line. The ball was scrambled to his left, blocked again, then a second attempt by "Tiger" from 8 metres was brilliantly bundled round his left-hand post by the keeper at point-blank range.

As the game moved towards the interval, the Stornoway midfield, "Bubble"/Jones/Bray/Davis/Macphail, re-asserted themselves and gradually gained control in the centre. On 39 minutes a de Boer special from Macleod, within his own half on the left, moving to the centre-line, found "Bubble" ghosting wide of the line on the right and into the box, but his snatched finish from 16 metres flew well-wide of Beaton's left-hand post. As Carloway

struggled under concerted Aths' pressure in the closing minutes to clear their lines, with some suicidal Roger Byrne-type dribbling across their own box, the ball was eventually whipped out a minute from half-time to find "Dokus" running clear through a committed Athletic defence in the centre. Midway within the Stripes' half he switched a diagonal right to the unmarked Fraz Mac but from the right-corner of the box his thunderous volley cleared Macritchie's bar by a metre. There's no truth in the rumour it went through the net.

Half-Time: **Carloway 2 Athletic 1**

The final minutes of the first half had served as a warning to Carloway of difficulties multiplying in midfield, and elsewhere, as the half progressed, and the defence beginning to creak under sustained pressure. The pace and aggression of "Bubble"/Jones/Bray were draining Mackay, Anderson, and "Sqweg", allowing Donnie Macphail and "Nuck" to supply, while "Tiger" and "Barra" were increasingly sucked back in defensive support, further isolating a strangely quiet Fraser Macleod, followed everywhere by Elliott Rudall, with Jason Maclean doing likewise to "Dokus". The Blues' marking appeared to be zonal, by design or necessity, so the problem of Robert Jones remained unresolved.

Things did not improve for na Gormaich. On 49 minutes a Mackay trip allowed Robert Jones to send a 20-metre free-kick in the centre fizzing a foot over the bar. On 57 minutes a chipped Macphail free-kick, 24 metres out on the right, led to Beaton blocking an attempted conversion low in his 6-metre box. The ball broke out to Bray but from 10 metres he somehow managed to clear the bar with his drive. Two minutes later Jones once more went clear inside the box on the right and his high cross, 8 metres from the bye-line, had to be touched past for a corner by Beaton under his right junction of bar and post.

Suddenly, on 66 minutes, a break down the left gave Carloway an unexpected chance to kill the tie, when "Fraz Mac" was sent racing in, on a long ball, behind the defence and into the left of the Aths' box. Macritchie was out like a flash to make himself big and Macleod's blistering low drive whacked against him and away.

From that incident on, the Semi-Final inexorably slipped from the Blues' grasp. An Athletic move down the right saw a low cross come in from just outside the box, 12 metres from the bye-line. As "D.I." moved in front of an attacker to block, the ball appeared to strike his upper left arm/shoulder; the officials had no doubt. Again, Beaton chose correctly, diving low to his left but the pace of Davis's penalty took it off his hands and into his bottom left corner (**2-2**).

Four minutes later a speculative Davis drive from 30 metres was deflected inwards and right to Jones, who broke forward but sent his low attempt from 16 metres across goal and past Beaton's right-hand post. Finally, the Stornoway men took the lead they had been threatening when one of a succession of free-kicks, 22 metres out on the right, 18 metres from the bye-line, was driven low across goal by "Xavi" Macphail, where it escaped everyone to shoot into the far right-hand corner of the Blues' goal (**2-3**).

Carloway were distinctly wobbling now, without shape or concerted purpose, as Athletic tried to kill the contest: on 81 minutes Jones was sent clear once more down the left but as he progressed into the box, Beaton rushed to block him, 16 metres from goal. Two minutes later, again Beaton had to look smart to block "Bubble", moving into the left of his box. Carloway tried to push in the closing minutes but once more were caught by a fast-breaking Jones from a long clearance but somehow Maciver, pursuing him for close on 40 metres, managed to chase him down 16 metres from goal and block for a corner to Beaton's right.

Na Gormaich's final throw of the dice came right on the whistle as an Anderson corner on the Aths' left was met 8 metres out by the head of Macleod but, under pressure, he could not direct

his effort and it cleared the bar high.

Full-Time: Carloway 2 Athletic 3

It was an unfortunate evening for the Blues, best forgotten, a tie in which they battled hard to compete for the first half-hour, then witnessed a possible victory lurching further and further away from them in the next hour. Overall, it perhaps perfectly illustrated the decisive effect of Crossley's presence on the left and the forceful contribution of Macaulay in his trademark *trequartista* role. "Gochan's" explosive influence on the right should never be under-estimated either. Perhaps Seumas Macleod, also, may be irreplaceable.

Yet, allowing for their crucial absence, the performance tonight slipped markedly below a Champions' standards. The Mackay/Anderson/"Sqwegg" centre, at times, seemed overpowered by the pace and power of the Aths' men they had dealt with competently in three previous confrontations, while Robert Jones whizzed through or round them at will. Domhnall Mackay, in his eagerness to return to a Captain's pivotal role, probably returned too early as, at times, he appeared to still be 36,000 feet over the Atlantic, while the usually deadly Fraser Macleod hardly featured and seemed exasperated by his own inability to contribute meaningfully. Calum Tom Moody also became increasingly frustrated as the game unfolded.

Sometimes the harder you try to make amends, the less effect you have. Injuries to "Tiger" and "Sqwegg" did not help, but the game was already drifting by the time of the latter's departure and intolerable pressure was more and more thrown on the faultless stalwarts at the back, Gus Maciver, and "D.I.", who remained true to the cause throughout. The arrivals of Ben Smith, wide on the right, and Jack Buchanan, through the centre into attack, though welcome, was hardly educational, as by then the experienced performers were battling to save the ship, and had no time to support or instruct. Perhaps, as Guus Hiddink said, after that particular nightmare versus Barcelona in the Champions SF at Stamford Bridge, you simply have to grin through your teeth, learn from bitter experience, and move on stronger.

Carloway Man of the Match: David Beaton.

Athletic Man of the Match: Robert Jones.