

Acres Boys' Club Cup Semi-final:

Athletic 1 (0) Carloway 1 (1) After extra-time. (Carloway won 4-2 on penalties)

Nic "Nuck" Davis 64 (pen.) Leigh Johnson 40

At Goathill Park, Stornoway.

Monday, 28.4.14.

Referee: D.J.Maclean.

Standside line judge: Paul Forster.

Farside line judge: Stuart Macleod.

MANAGER: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

David Beaton

Donald "D.I." MacIennan Gus Maciver Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur
Leigh Johnson Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Murdo "Sqweg"
Macleod Archie Macdonald

Fraser "Frazmac" Macleod Jack Buchanan

Subs.: Kevin "Gochan" Macleod (Archie Macdonald) 33; Kevin "Barra" Macneil (Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald) 45; Chris "Christy" Smith (Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod) 68; Josh Harris (Jack Buchanan) 90.

Sub. not used: Gordon Craigie.

MANAGER: Magnus Johnson

D.J. Clinton Scott Maciver

Scott "Flapjack" Macaulay ☒ Nic "Nuck" Davis Robert Jones Stuart "Bubble" Macdonald
Gary Macleod

Scott Morgan Ali "Koch" Morrison Elliott Rudall ☒

Colin Macritchie

Sub.: Mo Affah (Stuart "Bubble" Macdonald) 86

Yellow card: Elliott Rudall (?) 33; Scott "Flapjack" Macaulay 100.

It really was a case of "*Needs must when the devil drives*", tonight for na Gormaich, as their preferred midfield was posted missing: Dan Crossley was out of hospital but ruled out with that painful muscle injury, while prime *animateur*, Billy Anderson, was unavailable. The solution had to be to move defensive colossus, Domhnall Mackay, to right midfield; start Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald in the centre beside Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod, and recall the ever-dependable Donald "D.I." MacIennan to right wing-back to augment Gus Maciver and Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur.

Not the ideal time, of course, for a first change to an undefeated formation - a first visit to Goathill, against main rivals, Athletic (along with Westside), for honours this season. Carloway could expect a full-blooded welcome from last year's Championship runners-up, who had pursued the Blues throughout 2013 and had deservedly concluded the season with Moldova Lewis Cup success. Face-to-face, Carloway had had the greater cause to smile, with early victory, 3-0, in this same Cup at the same stage at this ground, thanks to a Fraser Macleod hat-trick; two pulsating League victories, 2-0 at home in June, followed by a vital 3-0 win a month later in Stornoway, before Aths

gained revenge 3-2, at Cnoc a' Choilich, in the Moldova Lewis.

The Stornoway men had seen little change over the close season: Darren Macleod had gone to Point; Jason Maclean was not present, and Steven Clinton and Ally Walker were injured, but perennial *bête noire* and Hammer of the Blues, Scott Maciver, lined up, albeit in a slightly withdrawn role, with Lewis and Harris Young Player of 2013, Robert Jones, behind him.

The weather was favourable, with only the slightest cold breeze, as the tie opened predictably: i.e. like a Coliseum scene from *Gladiator*. Russell Crowe would not have been out of place. On 6 minutes "Dokus" broke clear on the right and his sharp, low cross reached "D.I." on the near edge of the box to flight in, but Macritchie flicked his lob over the bar. Three minutes later it was "Frazmac" clear on the right and his hard, early cross was met by the head of Buchanan, under pressure, but his effort looped well over the bar.

Carloway's bright opening continued and after 12 minutes a neat inter-passing movement down the left, involving Macdonald, Mackay, and Macleod, led to the striker sending in a low strike from 20 metres which Macritchie was careful to follow, low at the foot of his right-hand post. A minute later it was Jones's turn to demonstrate his expertise, and didn't he just, brilliantly eluding two career-ending tackles, as he moved from the centre down the right, before sending in a ferocious, head-high cross, which was just too strong for the arriving Maciver to angle, and from 16 metres, in the centre, it whizzed away at full-speed on to Goathill Road.

A similar pattern was emerging to that of Monday's West side derby, with heavy man-to-man marking vastly reducing clear-cut chances: Elliot Rudall on "Frazmac"; Mackay v. Scott Maciver; "Sqweg" on Jones. Head-to-head on the left were Archie Macdonald and Gary Macleod; "D.I." and "Flapjack" on the right. Gus Maciver and "Koch" did not cross the halfway line. The bone-jarring tackling did not facilitate fluency either.

After a "Sqweg" free-kick on the right edge of the box was scrambled away, an Archie Macdonald hamstring injury introduced the mercurial "Gochan". Immediately, a mighty "Sqweg" free-kick, from just inside his own half, had to be headed backwards over his own bar, from 16 metres, by Rudall. This led to a series of corners, the second causing a furious mix-up in the Aths' box before being booted clear.

Then, unexpectedly, na Gormaich took the lead. A throw-in, 20 metres from goal on the left, allowed "Dokus" to head the ball onwards; it ricocheted off an Athletic head, to Buchanan, turning in along the edge of the box rightwards, and he managed to tip it through to Johnson. Without hesitation, the wing-man whacked a left-foot curler round the covering back-line to enter the net beyond an unsighted keeper, off the base of his right-hand post (**0-1**).

As the half time whistle approached, a sudden Athletic break through the centre saw Davis play the ball forward; an attempted clearance ricocheted back behind Gus Maciver and his namesake seized on the ball to carry it

towards the edge of the box, before slipping the ball left to the unmarked "D.J.", but in his anxiety to get round the ball to use his right foot to curl it round Beaton's left, he mishit it straight to the keeper.

Half-time: Athletic 0 Carloway 1

Carloway's midfield woes were multiplying rapidly: first, Crossley and Anderson were unavailable; after half an hour, they were joined by Archie Macdonald; "Dokus" now retired at the break, with "Barra" on from the start.

Immediately, Jones had a chance deep within the Carloway box, on the left, but the ball broke unkindly behind him. He jinked his way back, and whipped round, but from 18 metres, his shot slid past Beaton's right-hand post. Two minutes later more clever play by the Aths's starlet saw him escape down the right again but his low, hard cross surprised Scott Maciver as it was allowed to reach him in the centre, 12 metres from goal, rebounding off him to the left, before Beaton charged out to boot it clear.

The Stripes' push continued with a "D.J." corner on the left forcing Beaton to punch clear, under pressure. Seven minutes later a beautiful diagonal from "Sqweg" cutting the line freed "Gochan" on the left, to carry the ball towards the bye-line. His low square cross was met perfectly by the arriving Buchanan, but blocked away for "Sqweg" to meet on the edge of the box. However, his low effort raced well past Macritchie's right-hand post.

Then, just as it looked as if the Blues' had weathered this initial storm, Athletic were back in it after 64 minutes. A disputed penalty arrived, falling within the *"depends whom you support"* category. Jones, on the right, beat "D.I." ever so neatly, stepping outside his tackle to the right edge of the box, then sharply turning inside, where a precipitate Maciver right-leg challenge tumbled him. *"Stonewall"*, said the referee. "Nuck" was unfazed by the protests and stroked the ball elegantly to Beaton's right (1-1).

The Blues now realized the game had to be won all over again: immediately, a "Frazmac" pass supplied Johnson, 24 metres out in the centre, and his flashing drive was punched away brilliantly by Macritchie at full stretch to his left. Macleod acted as the supplier again to free Buchanan running clear on the left but the keeper read the youngblood's strike perfectly, low to his left. A minute later it was Aths' turn to hit the woodwork as dead-ball king, Gary Macleod, crossed from the right for Maciver, 14 metres from the goal in the centre, but his header cracked upward and over from the top of the bar.

On 68 minutes the last remnant of Carloway's established midfield departed, with "Christy" replacing "Sgweg". Four minutes later a Macleod corner on the left reached Macaulay by the near post 12 metres from goal, but his header flashed wide of the far post.

The game now resembled a Wimbledon Men's Final as both sides charged relentlessly, desperate to avoid extra-time and/or the dreaded penalty shoot-out. After 76 minutes "Frazmac" once more was the supplier, this time for

"Barra" on the right, but his right-foot shot from 18 metres, flew over the left-hand bar. Three minutes later Gus Maciver burst forward, and from the halfway line supplied "Barra" breaking on the right. The wing-man moved in, and slid a long diagonal in for Macleod to just touch past Macritchie by the near post but into the side netting.

Right at the death, another Gary Macleod cross, 18 metres from the bye-line on the right, was brought down expertly by Maciver in front of goal, 16 metres out, to lay off left to "D.J.", but his drive went over Beaton's left-hand bar.

Full-time: Athletic 1 Carloway 1

On 99 minutes it was Affah's turn to show the most precise of skills to control and supply Jones from the right touchline, midway within the Carloway half. The midfielder then supplied "D.J." but his shot from 18 metres was blocked easily by Beaton. Two minutes later a magnificent defence-splitter through the centre from Jones, midway within the Blues' half, allowed Affah to move in one-on-one on Beaton but the keeper was out like lightning to block his right-foot SLIP on the penalty spot.

On 103 minutes a long ball from Maciver was trapped cleanly by Frazmac on the edge of the box but his lay-off left to "Gochan" saw the latter's shot deflected for a corner. A minute later only a frantic Morgan tackle cleared the ball from Harris, racing in on Macritchie, 12 metres from goal.

As referee D.J. Maclean looked at his watch, an amazing series of escapes occurred for Aths: a Harris cross from the left was nodded on by Macleod, 12 metres from goal, and touched on and past by Macritchie for a corner on the right. Mackay met the corner 10 metres out, but the keeper reacted instinctively to push the header up. The ball came down, bounced on the bar, then dropped, and "Frazmac", 6 metres out and directly underneath, could not get the angle right, and his header lifted over the bar. Quite a night!

After extra-time: Athletic 1 Carloway 1

Penalties:

Athletic

1. Gary Macleod scored 1-0

2. Scott Maciver scored 2-1

3. Ali "Koch" Morrison saved 2-2

4. Nic "Nuck" Davis saved 2-3

Carloway

Donald "D.I." Maclennan scored 1-1

Fraser Macleod scored 2-2

Leigh Johnson scored 2-3

Kevin "Gochan" Macleod scored 2-4

Quite a night! 120+ minutes of full-blooded ("full-bloodied" perhaps) entertainment. It's a pity such affairs have to be settled by the dubious method of penalties, but they do supply extra drama, and there can be only winner - and loser, too, unfortunately.

Present were all the best qualities - and a few others - of island football. The standard of play was high; the desire for victory overpowering at times; the

tackling bone-jarring, occasionally bordering on the actionable. Exemplary skill was evinced primarily by Robert Jones in midfield, and on the wing. What a shame Dan Crossley was absent tonight as it would have been mesmerizing to see two of the island's best footballers squaring up in the centre of the field. Not that anyone else was found lacking. How could it be with additional ball-players like Nic "Nuck" Davis, Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod, and Scott Maciver around.

However, it was the faultless back-lines that kept the teams ticking and equal, in Maclennan, Maciver, and Macarthur, and Morgan, Morrison, and Rudall. After all, this was really a draw, which, if it had been in the League, would have been a fair result. It was hard to see a hairbreadth between these sides, and between them and Westside, so any of the three could prevail in September.

Once again, Domhnall Mackay led by example. dominant in midfield, supportive in defence as required; Gus Maciver and David Beaton resolute and unflinching at the back, while Fraser Macleod showed another side to his portfolio with deep dropping off, to supply countless killer lay-offs to his fellow strikers. However, they were to be continually denied by outstanding performances from Colin Macritchie and Ali "Koch" Morrison.

Athletic Man of the Match: Robert Jones

Carlaway Man of the Match: Domhnall Mackay