

Highland Amateur Cup: Round 2:

Athletic 0 (0) Carloway 2 (0)

Domhnall Mackay 49 (pen.)

Jack Buchanan 56

Saturday, 31st May.

Ref.: Paul Forster.

Standside line judge: David Smith.

Farside line judge: Neil Macritchie.

Gordon Craigie

Donald "D.I." Macennan. Gus Maciver Cameron "Tiger" MacArthur

Leigh Johnson Domhnall Mackay(capt) Dan Crossley Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod Josh Harris

Jack Buchanan Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald

Subs.: Ross Maciver (Josh Harris) 34.

Subs. not used: Ross "Tiny" Maclean; Kevin "Barra" Macneil; Billy Anderson; Gordon "Tago" Macdonald.

D.J.Clinton Robert Jones

Stuart "Bubble" Macdonald Elliot Rudall Nic "Nuck" Davis Donnie Macphail Gary Macleod

Scott "Flapjack" Macaulay Steven Clinton Ross Macrae

Colin Macritchie (capt?)

Subs.: Paul Afrin (Elliot Rudall) 70; Sven Wiltshire (Steven Clinton) 72.

Yellow card: Scott "Flapjack" Macaulay 57.

Perhaps not the opponents or venue of choice for such a fixture, but for the third time this season, Carloway had to travel east to Goathill to face an Athletic side, anxious to record a first victory over the team who took their title from them last season. In an interesting twist, this was to be a rerun of the memorable tie, played in the same round of the same cup, exactly six years ago to the day, at the same venue, which was decided by a Blues' goal in added-on time, following the famous "*over the bye-line*" incident. Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod, Gordon "Tago" Macdonald, and Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald all started that afternoon; Kevin "Gochan" Macleod was a substitute; and the latter two featured on the 4-3 scoresheet.

The first two meetings this year had also been remarkable, in vastly different ways: a penalty shoot-out had been required to settle their first meeting, after a Nic "Nuck" Davis penalty cancelled out a first half opener from Leigh Johnson in a fluctuating ABC tie, which could have gone either way; the League confrontation, however, was decided early, thanks to a cracking first strike from Josh Harris, plus a début hat-trick from Jack Buchanan, as na Gormaich surpassed even their own expectations - and certainly their fans' - with a 5-1 trouncing of the Hoops.

This afternoon, Carloway were missing Phil Macleod, David Beaton (work commitments), Archie Macdonald (leg injury at Lionacleit), Kevin "Gochan" Macleod (ankle), and Fraser Macleod (suspended for three matches after his altercation with Dan Macphail in the ABC Cup Final). However, Leigh Johnson was now fully-fit and Dan Crossley had recovered from injury at Lionacleit. Playmaker, Billy Anderson, was able to start on the bench, alongside fans' favourite, Gordon "Tago" Macdonald, in his first appearance in blue for over a season.

Aths had their problems too: defensive rock, Ali "Koch" Morrison, was unavailable, while the Blues' number one bogey-man, Scott Maciver, was on holiday. There is no truth in the rumour that the Blues' squad had a whip round to pay for it. This allowed ex-Blue, Ross Macrae, now based in Edinburgh, to make his first start for Athletic this season, partnering the ageless Steven Clinton, at the heart of the Stornoway defence.

Saturday afternoons are not the starting times of choice on the islands but it was a warmish, wind-free day, pleasant weather for the players to perform in front of a disappointing crowd for such an important meeting between two of the teams *du jour*. An enterprising opening from Carloway created several early free-flowing moves, leading to numerous near-things.

Immediately Crossley broke on the right and his low diagonal inwards from midway within the Athletic half was knocked back from the centre edge of the box by Buchanan to "Dokus", to strike low and hard from 20 metres, a metre past Macritchie's right-hand post. Moments later "Sqweg"/Crossley interplay in the centre circle released "Dokus" behind Macleod and wide of Clinton on the left and his low, squared cross, 12 metres from the bye-line, was met perfectly by Buchanan, ghosting in front of Macrae, but Macritchie read his right-foot strike perfectly, to pull off a brilliant diving block to his left. A minute later only a timely Macrae tackle, 16 metres from goal, prevented Buchanan bursting in from the left on to a "Dokus" through ball.

Athletic rode the storm and, in the 9th minute, broke on the left, but Maciver moved smartly to deny "Bubble's" inward diagonal finding D.J. on the edge of the box. A minute later Macphail's break, then cross, found Jones, 20 metres on the left, but he didn't quite get hold of his shot and the ball spun two metres over the bar.

A Macleod free-kick, 22 metres out on the left, then crashed harmlessly against the wall, spinning leftwards for a clattering Crossley challenge to win the loose ball, then speed off like lightning towards Macritchie. He checked inwards past two defenders, 20 metres out, before sending a low daisy-cutter just outside the keeper's left-hand post. A Jones attempt from the left edge of the Carloway box was deflected dangerously to Craigie's left, but the keeper smothered it, before Crossley reprised his earlier run but this time his right-footer slid a foot past Macritchie's right-hand post.

Carloway were edging territory and possession and generally dictating the pattern of the game; however, the failure to capitalize drove them harder. On 35 minutes Mackay won the ball on the centre-line, then supplied Buchanan on the right, but his strike from 22 metres whizzed two metres past. Three minutes later Johnson eluded "Flapjack" coming in on the right but Macritchie blocked low by his left-hand post. The ball spun loose and again the keeper blocked expertly, this time from "Dokus", before the second rebound was crashed over and wide of the bar from 12 metres.

Athletic had competed hard, as always, but playmaker/striker, Robert Jones, permanently accompanied by "Tiger", had been forced deep and continually had to play across the line, also due to Gus Maciver's excellent marshalling of the Carloway back-line. "Nuck's" creativity had been stifled by Crossley's enterprise, Macphail and "Bubble" in turn forced wide. Chances had not materialized. Then, suddenly, in added-on time, a "Bubble" break on the left resulted in a low diagonal from midway within the Blues' half which ran right across the line to D.J., darting in front of Ross Maciver, into the right of the box. From 16 metres he sent a measured waist-high right-footer across Craigie inside the far post; but the keeper got down smartly to block. Jones was first to react and from 8 metres knocked it forward, but Craigie, miraculously, managed to smother the ball to his right on the goal-line.

Half-time: Athletic 0 Carloway 0

The first half had '*no-score draw*' written all over it, which, of course, would have led to another dreaded penalty shoot-out, when suddenly for the second successive week a mysterious penalty arrived, this time favouring na Gormaich. A beautiful in-swinging corner from the Aths' right was heading home under the centre bar, before Macritchie brilliantly pawed it away with his right hand, under pressure from "D.I.". The whistle blew, apparently penalizing Macleod's challenge. However, the whole Athletic squad immediately congregated round the referee, protesting. It was a penalty! The cause for the award was unclear, though, seemingly, as the back-line and the Blues' attack rushed inwards to reach "Sqweg's" corner, Macrae had impeded Buchanan in some way. Mackay stayed calm and blasted the ball low to Macritchie's right (0-1).

As the Hoops struggled to regain their poise, another Carloway corner on the left led to Mackay

challenging Macritchie and the ball breaking right. He turned the ball back to "Sqweg", 22 metres from goal on the right, but his attempt to lob the stranded keeper went well over the bar. On 55 minutes Jones freed "Bubble" down the left, and 12 metres from the bye-line he sent in a low square cross which led to confusion in the Blues' box. The ball broke out untidily to "Nuck", whose snapshot was blocked; Jones met the rebound 10 metres out but his stabbed attempt somehow went a metre wide of Craigie's right-hand post.

A minute later the tie appeared to have been decided, when Crossley won the ball just inside his own half, then burst forward leftwards, drawing the defence to him like a magnet. He then slipped the ball left to the unmarked Buchanan on the left edge of the box, and the ace striker sent the sweetest of strikes home, low to Macritchie's right (**0-2**).

The pattern of the contest now changed abruptly, with na Gormaich consciously dropping back, inviting Athletic forward, and employing the sudden charging run or long ball to threaten, but still the Stornoway side were unable to create the golden chance. The chances still fell to the Blues: on 65 minutes a "Dokus" break on the left saw him check, then turn inwards, but his shot from 20 metres just cleared the bar, before the best move of the game so far witnessed the ball moved rapidly from Crossley to "Sqweg" to Johnson to Buchanan, and the parting shot from 18 metres on the right just curve low past Macritchie's right-hand post. Six minutes later a "Dokus" back-heel saw Mackay lob over from 20 metres; then "Dokus" himself won the ball on the right and drove the ball a foot past from 20 metres.

Athletic finally realised it wasn't to be, when "Van Der Sar" in the Carloway goal pulled off two amazing late saves. On 79 minutes a Macphail free-kick from the halfway line dropped beautifully into the Carloway box, ricocheted around, was suddenly driven forward by Wiltshire hard towards goal, but Craigie somehow managed to get his body in its path, and the loose ball was eventually booted as far as Rodel. Two minutes from time a lob into the Blues' box was dropping nastily behind the retreating line, 10 metres out, and within the general melée a flailing Carloway boot seemed to thwack the ball goalwards, but Craigie, unbelievably, managed to get his upper left arm positioned to block it.

Full-time: Athletic 0 Carloway 2

Again, a massive team performance from na Gormaich despite missing several regulars and ongoing injury problems. With Crossley and "Sqweg" in sparkling form, Jack Buchanan fast and sharp, and Johnson and "Dokus" full of enterprise and running, team spirit was high. Gus Maciver and Domhnall Mackay continue to be adamantine in their resolve, with both enjoying, arguably, the best form of their careers. The Maclennan/Maciver/"Tiger" back-line was rock-solid, and Macarthur once again was effective in nullifying the ever-present threat from Robert Jones. Crossley in turn successfully stifled Davis's creativity. The absence of the talismanic Scott Maciver obviously affected na Gormaich's opponents, but with him nowadays operating deep, it's debatable whether the Maciver/Jones/"D.J." triumvirate would have achieved much more this afternoon, considering how "hot" the Blues' defence is at the moment. The only concern is the ratio of chances converted to chances created, but if the midfield/attack continues to fashion as many in every match as they did in this tie, surely the law of averages will deliver reasonable scores per game. Jack Buchanan is already twice the player he was on the opening day of the season at Creagan Dubh and, hopefully, he will score twice the number of goals on his return to that ground in the Jock Stein as he did on that first night!

Athletic Man of the Match: Colin Macritchie.

Carloway Man of the Match: Dan Crossley.