

Eilean an Fhraoich Cup Round 1 Leg 1:

Carloway 4 (1) Back 1 (0)

Jack Buchanan 29, 47

Jason Macleod (pen) 65

Gordon "Tago" Macdonald 87

Coinneach Smith (o.g.) 90+1

Ref.: D.J. Maclean (Bragar).

At Cnoc a' Choilich.

Monday, 23.6.14.

Jack MacIennan (United)

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

Kevin "Barra" Macneil Billy Anderson Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod Stuart "Bubble" Macdonald (Athletic) Calum "Dola" Morrison (Ness)

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Jack Buchanan

Subs.: Gordon "Tago" Macdonald (Calum "Dola" Morrison, Ness) 38; Gordon MacIennan, United, (Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald) 45.

Subs. not used: Gordon Craigie; Chris "Christy" Smith; Ross Maciver.

More than a fortnight had elapsed since Carloway's last competitive outing, curiously enough against the same opposition, here, at Cnoc a' Choilich, in a narrow 3-1 League victory, made memorable because of a dream strike from Jack Buchanan in stoppage-time which had completed his hat-trick.

However, because of the nature of the Eilean an Fhraoich, it's debatable, of course, whether or not it is correct to describe the teams tonight as the "same" teams. For instance, the Blues' regular keeper, David Beaton, represented the Bacachs tonight, with United's goal-minder, Jack MacIennan, guarding na Gormaich's goal. His brother, Gordon, also of United, was on the bench; and Athletic's Stuart "Bubble" Macdonald, an EaF regular for na Gormaich, and Calum "Dola" Morrison of Ness, appeared on the midfield flanks, compensating for the ineligibility of Leigh Johnson, Josh Harris, and Archie Macdonald. Dan Crossley, unfortunately, had opted to turn out for Lochs this year. Also, Gus Maciver's stint at Rally Park necessitated midfield colossus, Domhnall Mackay, dropping back between the ever-dependable Donald "D.I." MacIennan and Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur, though Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald continued up front beside Jack Buchanan, despite continuing fitness concerns. Also, on the bench there was a welcome appearance for former great, Gordon "Tago" Macdonald, who last started a game for the Blues in August 2012.

Back were largely unrecognizable from the side who performed here on 6th June. Jason and Andrew "Mowgli" Macleod were there, and Ali "Tolsta" Maciver, but there was no show for Chris Macleod, Colin Maclean, and, thankfully, Murray Macleod. The Bacach guest-list, however, was impressive: apart from David Beaton, Athletic pair, Scott "Flapjack" Macaulay and Nic "Nuck" Davis, appeared, at left wing-back and central midfield/*trequartista* respectively; Chris Mackay (Lochs) at right midfield; and Campbell Macdonald of Westside made up a surprising two-man attack force with Ali "Tolsta" Maciver.

A vigorous run-out was essential tonight for all Carlowegians, in blue or otherwise, as, indeed, it was for the Bacachs, with Saturday's massive HAC Quarter-Finals approaching, against Wick Groats, the holders, and Uist and Barra champions, lochdar Saints. Victory for both on Saturday would set up the blood-tingling prospect of an all-Lewis semi-final at Goathill. Though the contest tonight did open rather sedately, the final 25 minutes (after Jason Macleod scored, that is), certainly provided plenty of heated action for all participants!

For once, the fans had a warm evening free of wind AND midges to enjoy proceedings on George Spy's masterpiece of a pitch, but, unfortunately, little early goalmouth action. The

unfamiliarity of the team line-ups, especially for Back, led to an initial lack of cohesion to each side's play and it was 7 minutes before serious danger to either side threatened. A mighty "Sqweg" free-kick, just inside his own half in the centre, was dropped perfectly on the penalty spot for Anderson to lay off to Buchanan but his effort was blocked.

On the quarter-hour another "Sqweg" free-kick, 16 metres from the bye-line, on the right of the box, was headed clear and led to a swift Back break down the right, where Mackay checked, then laid off to Davis moving unmarked into the right of the box, but Maclennan was out like a shot to block his carefully-placed low shot with his right foot. The ball then ping-ponged dangerously around within the Blues' area, came back to Davis, and he, in turn, laid back to "Tolsta" on the right edge of the box, but his pile-driver shot high over Maclennan's right-hand bar. Two minutes later a "Bubble" throw-in on the left, 16 metres from the bye-line, was back-headed in by Buchanan, then headed square back outwards, where it was won by "Dokus", who checked, then delivered a high cross towards the centre. Again it was headed straight back out, and again "Dokus" claimed the loose ball. He turned inwards past an opponent but from the left edge of the box sent his careful low right-footer inches past Beaton's left-hand post.

It took another ten minutes before the equilibrium was finally broken, by a piece of trademark Buchanan opportunism. As the Bacach back-pair approached the halfway line, preparatory to playing the ball forward, a sudden challenge by Buchanan led to the stopper getting into an almighty fankle, then the young striker touching the ball away from him. Immediately he took off round him like Usain Bolt and into the Back box, drew Beaton, then before Jason Macleod could close in on him from his right, slipped the ball neatly under the helpless keeper's left leg with his right-foot (1-0).

It was in 36 minutes before Back's best chance of the half appeared. A grinding tackle out on the right, just inside the Back half, gained the ball, and then played it straight forward to Chris Mackay racing free down the right. 20 metres from the bye-line he presented a perfect head-high cross winging diagonally into the Carloway box behind the retreating back-line. "Tolsta" and "Flapjack" came haring in by the back post but Maciver over-anticipated, the ball passing behind him to Macaulay, who, distracted by his colleague's attempt, failed to connect cleanly, and the ball was scrambled away untidily.

As the half-time whistle approached, two final opportunities arrived. First, Anderson freed "Barra" down the right, and his slightly overhit cross/shot from midway within the half, out on the bye-line, seemed for a moment to be about to deceive Beaton before dropping on to the top of his right-hand net. On the stroke of half-time a Mackay corner on the right did reach the far post for Davis, 14 metres from goal, to head strongly goal-wards, but his attempt went straight to the United keeper.

Half-time: Carloway 1 Back 0

The unique format to the EaF Cup makes it difficult, impossible really, to draw any conclusions about either side's future prospects, only to assess individual player performance. The introduction of Gordon Maclennan in the second half, for "Dokus", added extra pace to the Blues' breaks, leading to increased opportunity.

Immediately, a "D.I." long ball from the right bye-line, 10 metres inside his own half, sent his name-sake free down the right behind a surprised back-line but as he moved into the right side of the box, he pulled his right-foot shot across goal and well-wide. It was not to matter as two minutes later a second goal arrived. A high "Tago" free-kick from the centre line cleared the defensive line to the right and seemed to be running out harmlessly, when Anderson, on the bye-line on the edge of the box, somehow managed to hook it back high across goal with his

right-foot, for Buchanan, 14 metres out by the far post, to rise unchallenged and head strongly past an exposed Beaton **(2-0)**.

Moments later the hat-trick seemed on when "Tago" on the left touchline, 20 metres from the bye-line, sent in another perfect high ball but this time, Buchanan's looping header by the near post, 16 metres out, just cleared the bar.

However, danger at the other end suddenly presented itself in the 50th minute when a strong break on the left saw a glorious sweeping diagonal from the halfway line find Macdonald racing off the end of the line and into the right of the box. However, MacLennan dashed out to make himself as big as the Great Wall and swat Macdonald's attempted lob easily to his right with a giant sweeping left hand above his head.

In 62 minutes a Macdonald free-kick on the left touch-line, 20 metres from goal, was played square but the midfielder sent the ball high over the bar. However, the lifeline did arrive three minutes later for the men from Coll in the strangest of circumstances. A headed Jason Macleod clearance from the edge of his box rightwards was played swiftly down the right for Macdonald, midway within the Carloway half, to squeeze the ball onwards through a life-threatening "Sqweg" tackle for "Mowgli" running free on the right. His low hard cross, 14 metres from the bye-line, led to a brilliant "D.I." block on "Nuck" by the near post, the ball spinning high back out to "Mowgli", to race inwards to the right edge of the box, wrestling all the way, as he had all game, with "Tiger". "Mowgli" stumbled, and the ball seemed to get tangled between his legs; down he went, "Tiger" tumbling over him. "Tago" arrived, then Domhnall Mackay, and in the resultant melée of limbs and bodies, "Tiger" forced the ball outwards to his right from the prostrate "Mowgli". Immediately, the referee blew for a penalty, ruling that "Tiger" had scooped the ball away with his hands. Furious extended protests, of course, but Jason Macleod stayed calm, unlike many others, and fairly thwacked an unstoppable drive into the top right of MacLennan's net. The only way to beat a giant, perhaps **(2-1)**.

Suddenly, Back had all to play for as every goal counts in a two-leg tie, but despite increased commitment and pressure, the chances still continued to favour na Gormaich. In 68 minutes an Anderson corner on the left was met at the near post by MacLennan but his head-flick whizzed across goal and past the far post. Then, in 77 minutes, came a glorious opportunity for Back to salvage something from the tie. A Carloway attack was broken up on the central edge of the box and the ball played forward rapidly to Macdonald, in the centre circle. He turned and sent an exquisite defence-splitter leftwards between "D.I." and Mackay for Macaulay to ghost on to off the end of the line. However, once more, MacLennan reacted like quicksilver, and burst out to block "Flapjack's" flick to his left with a leg as long as the Clyde Tunnel, 12 metres from goal.

Two minutes later a hefty Anderson clearance was controlled beautifully by Buchanan, just inside his own half inside the centre circle. He turned inwards and round his marker and then zoomed off through the left of the defence on a typically mazy run, pursued by two defenders. In towards the left corner of Beaton's box he travelled before a clumsy tackle brought him down right on the edge of the box. However, "Tago's" measured free-kick was read expertly by Beaton, as it went to drop directly under his bar.

In 86 minutes Buchanan moved left to receive a "Sqweg" forward ball, checked back then inwards, and before he could be intercepted, sent a low daisy-cutter from the edge of the box against the base of Beaton's right-hand post and past. The evening was settled one minute later, however, when an almighty "D.I." clearance from his own area shot over Buchanan and his marker and was chested down by "Tago", 22 metres from the opposition goal, then touched left past his shadow. As Beaton advanced, "Tago" moved forward, then sent the sweetest of left-foot lobs over the stranded keeper **(3-1)**.

In the final minute of normal time, "Mowgli" won the ball on the halfway line, on the right touch line, then forced it forward to Davis, who managed to elude his marker and burst forward into the centre. 22 metres out he slipped the ball rightwards to "Mowgli", steaming through on his right like "the Flying Scotsman" to carry the ball onwards, then from 14 metres fire it across the advancing Maclennan but wide of the far post. But the game wasn't over yet. Deep in stoppage time Maclennan won the ball on the right centre line and turned it inwards to Buchanan, who reverse-passed the ball back to him breaking free down the right. He sped unmarked into the left side of Beaton's box and as the keeper rushed out to block, the young striker floated it round his right side towards goal, where the back-rushing Smith was unlucky to meet it at the near post at full speed. As the unfortunate stopper attempted to clear, he headed it strongly at point-blank range into his own net (4-1).

Full-time: Carloway 4 Back 1

In the end, it was rather decisive, two late goals giving the Blues an unexpected cushion for next Monday's second leg. Back, no doubt, feel they deserved more from a game in which they had an equal share of territory and possession for most of the play, but, of course, matches are decided by the ratio of chances taken to chances created, and na Gormaich certainly edged both in the second half, after a fairly even first 45 minutes.

The injection of added pace on the right from Gordon Maclennan, to offset and augment the persistent elusiveness of the roaming Jack Buchanan in the centre, was most likely the key, as the first-half composure of the Bacach back-line swiftly evaporated after the interval. However, the Blues' defensive trio, "D.I."/Mackay/"Tiger", remained resolute throughout against the three-pronged creativity of "Tolsta", "Nuck", and Macdonald, whose effectiveness as a unit was considerably reduced anyway, with "Tolsta's" departure through injury, early in the second half, scarcely good news with Saturday's collision with lochdar Saints approaching.

The possible Carloway performers on Saturday all acquitted themselves honourably tonight, with the added bonus of appearing to emerge unscathed, except for "Dokus", whose continuing leg problems are a constant cause for concern. The omens for Saturday's HAC contest are propitious, although the quality of the Cup holders will be challenging.

Carloway Man of the Match: Donald "D.I." Maclennan.
Back Man of the Match: Jason Macleod.