

Eilean an Fhraoich Cup Round 1 Leg 2:

Back 2 (2) Carloway 2 (0) (Carloway win 6-3 on aggregate).

Scott "Flapjack" Macaulay 23 Jack Buchanan 74
Euan "Moley" Macleod 26 Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald 90+1

Ref.: Calum "Chancy" Macleod.
At Col Uarach.
Monday, 30.6.14.

Gordon Craigie
Cameron "Tiger" MacArthur Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Donald "D.I." MacIannan
Kevin "Barra" Macneil ☒ Billy Anderson Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod Phil Macleod Stuart "Bubble" Macdonald
(Athletic)
Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald ☒ Jack Buchanan

Subs.: Gordon "Tago" Macdonald (Billy Anderson) 65; Gordon MacIannan (United), (Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod) 75;
Chris "Christy" Smith (Phil Macleod) 86
Subs. not used: Calum "Fluffy" Maclean (Point); Ben Smith.
Yellow card: Kevin "Barra" Macneil 78.
Red card: Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald 90+3

After the champagne celebrations (or was it Budweiser?) by Loch Broom on Saturday, it was not quite a return to the bread and butter of collecting League points, but what should have been the much more congenial task of defending, even hopefully adding to, a 4-1 First Leg lead in the EaF Round 1. How the Blues' squad viewed taking the field tonight, for whichever village they represented, only two days after their Herculean efforts on Saturday, is not on record. Hardly with unlimited glee would be the closest guess, considering they left Morefield Park around 2.20 p.m. on Saturday "drunk with fatigue", like WW1 troops returning from the trenches.

Still, all the eligible Blues were present, réprising most of last Monday's roles: Domhnall Mackay took one step back between Donald "D.I." MacIannan and Cameron "Tiger" MacArthur to replace Gus Maciver; Kevin "Barra" MacNeil and Stuart "Bubble" Macdonald (Athletic) once more rode point for the ineligible Leigh Johnson and Archie Macdonald, the latter unlikely to have featured anyway due to Saturday's hamstring injury; Calum "Dola" Morrison of Ness, injured in the First Leg, was out for the season, so Phil Macleod deputized in the middle with Billy Anderson and Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod; and Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald started up front with goal-machine, Uig's Jack Buchanan. Unfortunately, United's jolly green giant, Jack MacIannan, was unavailable but na Gormaich's own Edwin Van Der Sar, Gordon Craigie, was a more than adequate replacement, allowing Calum "Fluffy" Maclean (Point) to make his maiden appearance on the bench, beside Gordon "Tago" Macdonald, Gordon MacIannan (United), Chris "Christy" Smith, and teenage wing ace Ben Smith, home on holiday from Edinburgh.

A broadly similar Back side faced them, half-Bacach, half-guest, which included Aths' stars, Scott "Flapjack" Macaulay (left wing/back) and Nic "Nuck" Davis (central midfield/attack); Chris Mackay of Lochs (right wing/back); and Campbell Macdonald of Westside (right-side attack). Carloway's David Beaton was unable to feature (work commitments) and there was no-show from Andrew "Mowgli" Macleod, a persistent threat in the first game. Unfortunately, Murray Macleod, who has superseded Athletic's Scott Maciver as the Blues' No. 1 *bête noire*, did appear in his traditional role as roving left-winger, and there was place a in central midfield for Euan "Moley" Macleod, making one of his annual "come-backs".

To give meaning to the contest, Back knew they had to make early progress, and they did not disappoint. On a beautiful, cloud-free evening, which made the islands seem like Heaven on Earth, the Bacachs took the immediate initiative and the latter two Macleods basically controlled the first half against a lack-lustre, disorganised Blues' outfit, who appeared to play with all the

enthusiasm of a group of men called in to work on a day off. Or so it seemed. Despite the best efforts of captain Mackay, the midfield - Anderson, "Sqweg", "Bubble", and Macleod - and Buchanan up front, Carloway were unable to "get it together", playing as individuals more often than not, and were fortunate the Coll men's least effective area of operation was in the final quarter of the field.

On 7 minutes a lofted clearance by Mackay saw Buchanan lead, and win, the chase down the right. He performed his trademark check on the touch-line, 18 metres from the bye-line, turned back and inwards in one movement, leaving Dave Maclean floundering, but he didn't quite get hold of his shot from the right edge of the box, though a retreating Jason Macleod almost helped Carloway out by slicing his clearance narrowly over his own bar from 14 metres. It was a solitary ray of sunshine in a valley of gloom, with the early play inexorably travelling in the other direction towards birthday-boy Craigie.

A series of Bacach corners on the quarter-hour brought them no joy, ending with Anderson booting the ball downfield after a Murray Macleod shot from the edge of the box was charged down to the left. A minute later came a golden opportunity for Carloway to reverse proceedings, when "Dokus" won the ball in the centre, just inside the Back half, then supplied "Bubble" breaking left. He dummied his marker on the touch-line, broke, then 16 metres from the bye-line, sent the sweetest of squared head-high crosses dropping neatly into the centre between stoppers Macleod and Maclean for Anderson, ghosting in to head perfectly over a helpless Maciver - but a foot over the bar too.

Na Gormaich sagged a little again after that and the corners and free-kicks around their box in dangerous situations started - a sure sign they were losing the midfield battle. On 19 minutes a "Moley" free-kick, 20 metres out on the right edge of the area, was sent whizzing past Craigie's left-hand post by a metre. Three minutes later and a glorious cross-field diagonal from "Nuck", on the right centre line, saw Macleod racing behind an advanced back-line, through the centre, to lob the advancing Craigie from 20 metres. The ball was bouncing home before the chasing "Bubble" managed to catch it entering the 6-metre box and boot it rightwards to clear.

There was only a minute's reprieve for the Blues, as Macleod was soon in action again, this time out in the right corner of the field. He wriggled free of Macleod and "D.I." and laid the ball back and the high swinging inward cross found "Flapjack" bending towards it, 12 metres from goal, to beat Craigie and "Barra", and nod it into the empty net (1-0).

Another minute passed and Craigie had to react swiftly to his right to claw down a Macleod header, 12 metres from goal in the centre, off a "Moley" free-kick midway within the Carloway half. However, in the 26th minute it was two. An inswinging Macleod corner from the right was met by "Moley" running towards it 12 metres out, to send a glancing header well-wide of Craigie's right (2-0).

Na Gormaich were wobbling dangerously at this point, as confidence spurred the Coll men forward, with "Moley" and Davis controlling midfield, and Macdonald and Macleod losing their markers at will. Mackay assumed a captain's role: holding the line and pushing hard to link with the ubiquitous "Bubble", who, in turn, strove to establish a supply line to the Blues' most dangerous weapon, the equally roving Buchanan, isolated up front and on the receiving end of some "robust" tackling. Luck, leadership, and long-range shooting did quell the Bacach advance, but the best the Blues could muster at the other end against Maciver was an inswinging "Bubble" corner on the right being met by Mackay, 12 metres out by the near post, but he had to lean into it, and his header swung wide of the far post.

Half-time: Back 2 Carloway 0

Whatever “Windy” put in the half-time Bovril certainly worked. Or maybe it was the sharp end of his tongue! Certainly Carloway began the second half more purposefully, with a surer sense of organisation and individual purpose, knowing Back must be denied in the early stages of the second half. In 49 minutes a Macleod corner on the right was knocked out to Mackay on the right edge of the box, but he failed to connect cleanly and his effort trundled past the keeper’s right-hand post. Back immediately surged and the ball was headed out by Mackay towards the left where Macleod controlled it, midway within the half, then sent an inviting diagonal behind the advancing back-line, where Macarthur and Macaulay, left marginally onside, just failed to connect.

Both sides knew the next goal would probably be decisive. The pace quickened; the tackling became fiercer, but the clear-cut chances were few, at either end. In 58 minutes Macleod laid off perfectly from the right, midway within the Carloway half, but the arriving Maclean’s daisy-cutter from 24 metres was just too far from Macarthur’s toe, coming in from the left, 14 metres from goal. Then a golden opportunity arrived for the Bacachs in the 61st minute. A disputed Anderson foul on “Moley” in the centre, just outside the box, led to a curling Macleod left-foot free-kick which cleared the wall but was read by Craigie, shoulder-high to his right.

In 69 minutes another disputed free-kick, this time by “Tiger” on Macleod on the left edge of the box, led to a Jason Macleod right-foot free-kick clearing the bar by two metres. However, five minutes later and the tie was all but settled. Over-commitment forward by Back allowed “Bubble” to cut out the build-up on the Carloway left, then break at speed down the right touch-line, and his low forward pass released Buchanan on the right, off his marker. He carried the ball to the right edge of the box, turning inwards, and as the keeper came out to narrow the angle, send a perfect right-footer low to his right, and inside the far post. An absolute peach! (2-1).

In 79 minutes the irrepressible Macleod managed to turn inwards off his constant shadow, “Tiger”, then carry the ball along the line of the box but his left-foot shot from the right edge of the box went well-wide of Craigie’s right-hand post. In 83 minutes “Tago” set up neat play by Buchanan, Macleod and “Barra” just inside the back half on the Carloway right, and the high diagonal was brought down perfectly by “Dokus” in the centre, on the edge of the box. He neatly side-stepped two lunging tackles, then pulled his right-foot drive a metre wide of Maciver’s right-hand post.

Inside stoppage time, “Dokus” went for the goal of the season: as a Bacach attack broke down, the ball was cleared forward to him in the centre circle, inside his own half, and he instantaneously turned and dispatched a high up and under downfield over the Back keeper, watching play from the edge of his box. It cleared the keeper and was actually bouncing home, before Maciver somehow managed to get his left-foot to it under the bar and boot it clear to his left. What a goal that would have been, reminiscent of “Sqweg’s” goal against Westside on the old machair pitch in Barvas years ago, but the wind had a major hand in that one.

However, “Dokus” had two final contributions to make. In the third minute of extra-time, a “Tago” corner from the left was played straight to him low, 20 metres out in the centre of the pitch, and this time he stroked it home confidently with his right foot, well to Maciver’s right (2-2). In the dying seconds, a final drama: a breaking Buchanan, midway within the Back half, was brought down clumsily by his marker, Jason Macleod. In the compulsory melée that has to follow such events, “Dokus” decided to shove Jason a couple of times; the Back man reciprocated, so “Chancy” was compelled to invite both to have a long walk. Maybe they wanted in the shower first. It had been a draining evening!

Full-time: Back 2 Carloway 2

Carlaway were literally, and in terms of performance, not the same team as that on Saturday in Ullapool. Whether or not the missing elements - Gus Maciver and Dan Crossley, especially - are more fundamental to the Blues' success than is generally accepted is open to debate. Certainly, their personal contributions, game-by-game is beyond question. Also, Maciver's presence inspires a confidence throughout the team - when you know the back door is locked, you can keep looking forward - and the supportive and educational effect he has on "D.I." and "Tiger" is immense.

Though the commitment of the midfield tonight was considerable, especially of guest, Stuart "Bubble" Macdonald, who personally set up Jack Buchanan's classy goal, on such occasions, Domhnall Mackay, as captain, no doubt feels compelled to play two roles: as central stopper and midfield enforcer. Which he does very well, but necessarily he cannot be both places at once, and in a fast-moving game, this leaves opportunities for the opposition, especially if that opposition contains Euan "Moley" Macleod, who dominated the midfield here in the first half, and Murray Macleod, who was a persistent threat throughout, in every corner of the forward field.

The first half is perhaps best forgotten by Carlaway, and Back must regret not capitalizing on their extended first-half pressure, especially directly after their second goal when na Gormaich were all over the place. However, the Blues were given the interval to re-group and became a much more competitive outfit in the second half, which remained open till a moment of brilliance from Jack Buchanan enabled them to begin climbing out of a very deep hole.

Back Man of the Match: Murray Macleod.

Carlaway Man of the Match: Domhnall Mackay.