

Eilean an Fhraoich Cup Semi-Final Leg 1:

Carloway 4 (3) Ness 2 (1)

Gordon "Tago" Macdonald 21 Jack Dunlop 28
Ross Maciver 25 Leigh Johnson 81
Murdo "Sgweg" Macleod 43
Jack Buchanan 47

At Cnoc a' Choilich.

Monday, 14.7.14.

Ref.: Kenneth "Cloudy" Macleod.

Standside line judge: Neil Macritchie.

Farside line judge: Paul Forster.

Gordon Craigie

Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Phil Macleod Donald "D.I." MacIennan

Kevin "Barra" Macneil ☒ Billy Anderson Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Murdo "Sgweg"
Macleod Gordon "Tago" Macdonald
Ross Maciver Jack Buchanan

Subs.: Hamish Macdonald (United) (Jack Buchanan) 72; Chris "Christy" Smith (Murdo
"Sgweg" Macleod) 86.

Subs. not used: Calum "Fluffy" Maclean (Point); Euan Macleod; Ryan Macleod.

Yellow card: Kevin "Barra" Macneil 78.

Andrew "Bubble" Macleod ☒ James "Titch" Morrison

Donald Gillies Micheil Russell-Smith Andy Murray (Lochs) Craig Harris

Alistair Morrison ☒ Stephen Boyd D.J. Macdonald (Back) Jack Dunlop

Donald "Sweeney" Macsween (capt.)

Subs.: Leigh Johnson (Carloway) (James "Titch" Morrison) 11; Josh Harris (Carloway) (Jack
Dunlop) 73 John A Maciver (Craig Harris) 78.

Yellow cards: Alistair Morrison 88; Andrew "Bubble" Macleod 89.

Surprisingly, this was the two sides' first meeting of the 2014 Season, their last confrontation being played out one year and two days before at Fivepenny, in the League, the contest featuring a resounding 7-2 victory for the Blues, made memorable by Dan Crossley's spectacular right-foot Cruise missile, 40 metres from goal, in the 43rd minute. A month before that, however, Carloway's visit to the north in a Jock Stein SF had been rather more uncomfortable, with the Niseachs storming back from a 2-goal deficit to lead with 10 minutes to go, before a late own goal from the unfortunate Stephen Boyd enabled na Gormaich to grind out extra-time victory, with goals from Kenny "Beag" MacIennan and Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald. Two earlier Niseach visits to Cnoc a' Choilich, in the League and the HAC Round 1, had both resulted in straightforward, though uninspiring, 3-0 wins.

Meanwhile, Saturday's historic triumph over lochdar Saints had left the worthy and the faithful basking in a sea of euphoria (and Budweiser) at the

Sea Angling Club, so, understandably perhaps, there was a deflating air of anti-climax around the ground tonight, emphasized even further by the surrounding mist and an unrelenting drizzle. Extensive selection problems troubled the Carloway management also.

EaF rules, of course, ruled out almost half the squad, “Dokus” was suspended because of his uncharacteristic rush of blood at Col Uarach in the previous Round, and most of the usual guests were unavailable. Athletic’s Stuart “Bubble” Macdonald was on holiday, while Jack MacIennan (United) was at **T in the Park**; his brother, Gordon, was injured. Therefore, Gordon Craigie, as expected, slotted into David Beaton’s shoes, while Phil Macleod was given the more onerous task of becoming Gus Maciver, between Cameron “Tiger” Macarthur and Donald “D.I.” MacIennan. The dependable Kevin “Barra” Macneill and Billy Anderson took responsibility for right midfield, while Gordon “Tago” Macdonald and 16-year-old Ross Maciver started for the first time, at left half/wing and striker respectively.

The bench resembled the Croileagan at Breasclete School, as, beside the veteran, Chris “Christy” Smith, sat Hamish Macdonald, Calum “Fluffy” Maclean (Point), Euan Macleod, and Ryan Macleod.

Their opponents looked to be at full strength, with D.J. Macdonald of Back added in central defence, and class playmaker, Andy Murray of Lochs, linking up in central midfield with the mega-gifted Micheil Russell-Smith, behind deep-lying central forward and perennial thorn-in-the-flesh, Andrew “Bubble” Macleod. The strength of the squad was evidenced further by the fact neither of the Carloway stars, Leigh Johnson and Josh Harris, merited a place in the starting line-up.

The Blues’ participants’ unfamiliarity with their line-up led to an initial awkward tentativeness, which was cruelly exploited by Ness in the opening 20 minutes, down the right especially, by a constant supply to James “Titch” Morrison. A first minute free-kick on the left, midway within the Carloway half, was whipped in by Craig Harris and Morrison ran rightwards behind the line to connect, 16 metres from goal, but could only touch the whizzing ball onwards and Craigie blocked high instinctively. Moments later Dunlop took advantage of an early lack of understanding between “Tiger” and “Tago” on the Blues’ left to free Morrison down the right, and his pace carried him into the box but his drive from 16 metres was held comfortably by Craigie, low, by the near post.

Finally, Carloway got forward when persistent tracking back by Buchanan saw him win the ball in central midfield, then slip the ball forward for Anderson breaking through the centre on his left. From midway within the Niseach half

the Blues' class *animateur* released an exquisite defence-breaker diagonally right to allow Maciver to race in unhindered on goal, but "Sweeney" came rushing out to block this low strike from the edge of the box with his right foot. In 8 minutes a third Morrison break supplied "Bubble" in the centre, 14 metres from goal, but he had just stepped behind the line a moment too soon to touch home.

With the Blues' off the pace and the midfield failing to gel, the free-kicks started to come: first, Craig Harris's attempt cleared the bar from 30 metres in the centre, then "Bubble's" did likewise, from 25. A low drive by Harris on the left then went a metre wide of the near post from 25 metres, before Craigie had to rush out to grab a McIlroy special from Murray, as he tried to pick out "Bubble" moving behind the line. As Russell-Smith and Murray continued to rule the centre of the park, "Bubble" was once more sent racing into the box on the right, and only a perfectly judged tackle from "D .I." got the ball away from him.

Then, suddenly, Carloway astonished Ness – and themselves, probably - by taking a 20th minute lead. "Sqweg" and "Barra" combined in midfield to supply the ubiquitous Buchanan, moving at speed into the right of the Niseach half. Pace and control took him past Harris and Morrison to the byeline, and his high cross looped across goal to "Tago", unmarked by the far post, 14 metres out, to head down and inwards, where the rushing "Sweeney" did manage to get his right hand to it but could only push it into the roof of the net (**1-0**).

Four minutes later the Blues took advantage of a shaken Ness side to double their lead. A tentative ball through the centre from "Barra", inside his own half on the right, seemed to be being ushered safely back to "Sweeney" by "D.J." and Boyd. On the edge of the box, as the advancing "Sweeney" hesitated to grab the ball, the arriving Maciver stuck his right-foot in and the ball broke onwards to trundle into the net for the young star's first Senior goal for the club (**2-0**). Plenty of red faces around after that!

Four minutes later, the Niseachs clawed one back: a break through the centre saw the ball blocked rightwards, 12 metres from goal, then whacked back in low to be blocked again. An attempted shot in the 6-metre box was blocked outwards, to the edge of the box, where Jack Dunlop met it with a screamer that nearly went through the roof of the net (**2-1**). But the flag had been up from the initial attack! Offside? Who knew? However, after an interminable consultation between referee and line judge, the goal stood.

Ness were back in the game, and gradually re-asserted control. In 39 minutes a glorious through ball by Murray found "Bubble" breaking in the centre into

the box, but a brilliant double tackle by Phil Macleod saved the Blues, 10 metres from goal. Then the irrepressible “Bubble” was once again sent clear, to cut into the right of the Carloway box, but his careful shot was tipped away at full stretch by Craigie past the far post. The resulting Johnson corner was met by Gillies directly in front of goal, 12 metres out, but his powerful header soared a foot over the bar.

In 43 minutes, however, another unexpected blow arrived for the Niseachs. Maciver won the ball in the centre circle and fed it right to “Tago” moving down the left. Midway within the Ness half, he checked, then squared into the centre, and “Sqweg”, without hesitation, slammed in a ferocious, low right-footer from 30 metres, which whizzed wide of “Sweeney” into the left corner of his net (3-1).

Half-time: Carloway 3 Ness 1

It would have been interesting to have been in the Niseach dressing-room at half-time, to hear their thoughts on how they managed to be 1-3 down, after controlling so much of the first-half action. The make-shift Carloway back-line had performed creditably, as had the Maciver/Buchanan combination up front. It was the midfield that had struggled to perform as a unit. With Ness, it had been the opposite: the Murray/Russell-Smith/“Bubble” nexus had excelled, with Johnson, Harris, and Dunlop providing first-rate support. Going forward was no problem; it was repelling the pacy counter-breaks that had been the trouble.

Immediately, it got worse. “Tago”, deep within his own half, on the left, dispatched a long diagonal forward through the centre, which eluded Harris and ran on for Buchanan to carry at speed into the box, moving rightwards inside Morrison, and as “Sweeney” came out to block, Carloway’s chance-taker *par excellence* slipped the ball neatly under his diving body from 16 metres (4-1).

Whatever the second-half game plan had been, Ness now wobbled dangerously for ten minutes or so. In 52 minutes Mackay won the chase for a breaking ball on the left, leaving “Sweeney” stranded to the right of his goal, but his check, then return to “Barra”, was fired a metre over from 20 metres.

Finally, the Russell-Smith/Murray partnership re-established a presence in midfield, shape returned to the Niseachs, and Carloway started to drift back on their cushion. In 56 minutes Murray broke forward past two defenders but his left-foot attempt was a foot too high. Then a classic Charlie Gallagher, left from the centre circle, by Russell-Smith, released Harris to come in unchallenged on the left, but his 22-metre drive went a metre over.

As the Blues now contented themselves to wait for the break, Ness dominated possession, though close control on a greasy pitch was tricky. On the hour a corner on the left was nodded outwards by "D.I." but Dunlop's first-time drive from 20 metres lacked power and went straight at Craigie. Five minutes later, however, he had to look sharp to fist over a Harris free-kick, just outside the area and directly in front of goal. Three minutes later yet another Harris free-kick, from 22 metres outside the right corner of the box, went straight once more to Craigie.

In 77 minutes, the Blues finally managed to break down the right and win a corner. Macdonald managed to head the corner clear, and "D.I.'s" effort from 26 metres in the centre was handled safely by "Sweeney". At this stage, as everyone on the pitch looked as if they would be quite happy to go home, the Niseachs suddenly had two chances to lighten their gloom - and their task in the Second Leg. In 80 minutes a neat move down the right out of midfield, saw "Bubble" and Johnson wall-pass to the bye-line and win yet another corner. Johnson's vicious head-high corner then came in like lightning into the goalkeeper's nightmare position, curving in like a bullet directly under the bar. Craigie did get a hand to it but it was fated to end up high in the net (**4-2**). A real collector's piece of a corner!

Moments later the Carloway attack from the restart broke down in the Ness box and the ball was knocked forward into the Ness midfield, then rapidly forward for Johnson, Josh Harris, and "Bubble" racing 3 on 1 towards Craigie. Josh Harris was played into the box, waited for Craigie to approach, then sent a right-foot flick from 12 metres to Craigie's left but it carried insufficient weight and the keeper managed to get down low to scramble it away for a corner.

Full-time: Carloway 4 Ness 2

Once again, chances taken surpassed midfield possession and territory gained. Ness must have set a new record for the number of free-kicks and corners any team on the islands has ever had in a second half, but in the realm of clear-cut opportunity the sides were probably even. What divided them were two outstanding examples of inspired opportunism and control by Jack Buchanan, setting up one goal, scoring another, and a colossal first-half clanger by the Niseach defence. All the artistic elegance of Andy Murray, ably abetted by the industry, prodding, and laying-off of the gifted Micheil Russell-Smith, needed a dedicated finisher or two, and though "Bubble" lay in front of them and was practically impossible to get off the ball, he was more a Hidegkuti-type front man, not a Rummenigge.

The Carloway back-line, albeit with Phil Macleod as its cornerstone tonight, once more delivered in extremely trying conditions, shielded as ever by the redoubtable Makélélé-figure of Domhnall Mackay in front of them. Also, early dominance against a line-up trying to establish a clear *modus operandi* was squandered by the men from Ness, as it had been in Round 1, Leg 2, by the Bacachs, and, before they knew it, they were 2-down.

The unique format of the EaF makes it difficult to transpose any lessons learned tonight, if any, to na Gormaich's "*normal*" side, except to note the continuing outstanding form of participants like "D.I." even without his mentor, Gus Maciver, present; another flawless performance by the captain, Domhnall Mackay; how Jack Buchanan grows in power and skill with every appearance - his goal in the 47th minute being so coolly and expertly made and executed; and also that Phil Macleod displayed yet another string to his bow, by slotting in seamlessly in central defence. Watch out, Gus!

Carloway Man of the Match: Phil Macleod

Ness Man of the Match: Andy Murray.