

Eilean an Fhraoich Semi-Final Second Leg:

**Ness 4 (2)**

**Carloway 7 (4) Aggregate: 6-11**

Leigh Johnson 24

Jack Buchanan 7, 33, 42, 87

James "Titch" Morrison 41, 81

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald 19, 66

Andrew "Bubble" Macleod 90+1

Stuart "Bubble" Macdonald 60

At Fivepenny, Ness

Monday, 28.7.14.

Referee: Neil Macritchie.

Line judge 1: Calum "Chancy" Macleod'

Line judge 2: Allan Macleod.

MANAGER: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

In charge tonight: Kenny "Noley" MacIennan.

Jack MacIennan (United)

Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Domhnall Mackay (capt.) ☒ Chris "Christy" Smith (United)

Ross Maciver Scott Macaulay Murdo "Squegg" Macleod ☒ Stuart "Bubble" Macdonald

(Athletic) Gordon "Tago" Macdonald

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Jack Buchanan

Subs.: Alistair "Laxay" Macdonald (Harris) (Gordon "Tago" Macdonald) 37; Ryan Macleod

(Ross Maciver) 65; Hamish Macdonald (United) (Murdo "Squegg" Macleod) 76; Ewan

"a'Ghuilc" Macleod (Chris "Christy" Smith) 81; Gordon Craigie (Scott Macaulay) 85.

Yellow cards: Murdo "Squegg" Macleod 53; Domhnall Mackay 84

Craig Harris Leigh Johnson (Carloway)

Iain "Cheeks" Morrison Micheil Russell-Smith Andrew "Bubble" Macleod James "Titch"

Morrison

Alistair Morrison D. J. Macdonald (Back) Neil Morrison Calum Vann ☒

Ross Morrison

Yellow cards: Calum Vann 18

Fivepenny was unlikely to be the destination of choice tonight after last Wednesday's shenanigans, but it was best not to "*burden our remembrances with a heaviness that's gone.*" Hopefully the change in personnel necessitated by the EaF format might change the mood from the League match. Certainly, tonight's affair posed more immediate problems for Carloway. Of course, there was the usual raft of ineligible squad members, but the Blues had also to be mindful of Saturday's requirements and not inflict further suffering on an already imposing list of weary and battered limbs. Donald "D.I." MacIennan was ruled out, because of his grinding ankle injury in the 43rd minute last Wednesday, and Billy Anderson remained unavailable (at the Commonwealth Games - watching, not competing!), but midfield powerhouse, Murdo "Squegg" Macleod, was risked in central midfield after a

2-game absence, and emerging star, Ross Maciver, carried the flag on his right. Veteran returnee, Chris “Christy” Smith deputized for “D.I.” and squad captain, Domhnall Mackay, sank back between Cameron “Tiger” Macarthur and “Christy”.

Surprisingly, fans' favourite and much-missed attacking midfielder/striker, Scott Macaulay, was back on holiday on the island, and dubbed his boots for tonight's game. Fortunately, na Gormaich's usual two guests were also available: Jack Maclennan of United in goal and Athletic's Stuart “Bubble” Macdonald, now returned from holiday, completed the midfield, with Gordon “Tago” Macdonald on his left. In addition, Harris's versatile Alistair “Laxay” Macdonald made his début on the bench, beside the ageless Van Der Sar/Miloslav Klöse figure of Gordon Craigie, and young-bloods, Ewan “a’Ghuilc”, Ryan Macleod, and Hamish Macdonald.

The average age of the Carloway squad was unknown, although Craigie probably took the average to 40+. Youth was not confined to na Gormaich, of course. The Ness starting line-up included Ross Morrison between the sticks in place of Senior Citizen, Donald “Sweeney” Macsween: Calum Vann and Alistair Morrison at full-back, and a midfield including *animateur*, Micheil Russell-Smith, James “Titch” Morrison, and ace *trequantista*, Andrew “Bubble” Macleod. Na Gormaich's own danger man, Leigh Johnson, was at right attack and Josh Harris made the Niseach bench. No doubt, the Carloway support would have preferred them both to be wearing blue tonight.

The Costa Brava conditions did not continue from last Wednesday but it was still an attractive, sunny evening on a newly-cut Fivepenny - wind-less too, fortunately. Two goals had to be reined in, so Ness opened briskly and almost got one back immediately. Before “Christy” and “Tago” had even staked out the Carloway left, an early Niseach break on the right saw “Titch”, in a forward position, supply “Bubble” behind him on the edge of the box. The midfielder, on Maclennan's left, instinctively whirled round and snapped in a shot, low to the far corner, but Jack Maclennan reacted magnificently to push the ball past his right-hand post with what might have been his first touch.

In 7 minutes, however, an appearance in the Final moved further out of the Niseachs' grasp when a Mackay long ball was met by Macaulay in the centre, just inside the Ness half, to nod on backwards over the head of Neil Morrison and to the defender's left. Buchanan was on it in a flash, zoomed leftwards into the Niseach box, and as Ross Morrison rushed out to block, coolly stroked the ball home to his right from 16 metres (**0-1**).

Ness almost replied immediately when Russell-Smith won the ball on the left of the centre-line, then sent a perfect cross-field ball to the racing Johnson, to

flick on inwards to "Bubble", breaking into the box in the centre, but the pace and spin on the ball carried it a metre out of his reach to the arriving keeper. Nevertheless, the goal-fest was soon to begin.

The Niseach right midfield were finding it hard to close down Macaulay, and in 18 minutes his weight and power in the centre once more allowed him to shield, then supply Buchanan breaking forward on the left between back and stopper. A Calum Vann shove stopped his progress. Up stepped "Dokus" and from the identical position he scored the winner last Wednesday, he lifted a beauty over the wall and high into the net past Morrison's despairing left hand **(0-2)**.

Ness soon showed they could do spectacular as well. A Calum Vann/Russell-Smith/"Titch" move led to the ball being lifted on wide of "Christy" on the right for the breaking Johnson. He carried the ball just inside the box, then from the acutest of angles, unexpectedly unleashed a thunderbolt that almost broke the underside of the Carloway bar before pinballing around in the back of the net. What a strike! **(1-2)**.

Moments later, Ness once more poured forward and a cross-field passing movement allowed Harris to cut in from the left, to drive from 20 metres, but Maclennan held safely. Moments later Ali Morrison progressed on the left, to cross from just inside the Carloway half to the front of the box, where it was brought down expertly by "Titch", but he couldn't control his shot properly and it bounced harmlessly to Maclennan.

Soon, however, the skies once more darkened over Ness and, again, it was the dream-team that delivered, Stuart "Bubble" winning the ball in his own half, then playing it forward to Macaulay, who immediately sent the most perfect of de Boer's to the left over a covering defender for the breaking Buchanan to take off like a Shanghai maglev diagonally into the box, wait for Morrison to commit, then chip the ball past his left hand this time **(1-3)**.

A lull in the pace ensued: Carloway happy to hold; Ness disheartened, then suddenly another life-line arrived for the Greens in 41 minutes. As the Blues retreated, "Bubble" shielded the ball backward inside the centre of the Carloway half, before playing back to Calum Vann, who switched it right to Johnson and he immediately found "D.J.", breaking down the right in front of him. He made 10 metres from the bye-line, before squaring a low, hard cross, which "Titch" anticipated brilliantly to run to meet, leaving the back-line behind and ramming the ball into the top of the net **(2-3)**.

Straight from the kick-off na Gormaich replied, when "Christy" won the ball on the left centre-line and Macaulay seized on the ball breaking forward to send

a golden Charlie Gallagher diagonally across the retreating back-line for Jack Flash to ghost beyond them, and as the unfortunate Morrison approached, bulleted the ball home from 16 metres, high to his right (2-4).

The excitement wasn't quite over, however, as right on the whistle an Andrew "Bubble" free-kick on the edge of the box pranged off the top of the bar and down, was headed out, and another free-kick awarded, but this time "Bubble" hit the wall, and a shot from the rebound was safely held by the keeper under his bar.

**Half-time: Ness 2 Carloway 4**

Not quite the first-half most of the travelling fans had expected but who could have predicted the electric symbiosis between Scott Macaulay and Jack Buchanan: the inch-perfect supplier and the ice-cool finisher? Fraser Macleod once said that his goal chances, and hence his goal-rate, declined rapidly once Scott Macaulay had headed south; maybe, Jack - and quite a few others - would agree with this sentiment. Certainly the Niseach back-line would have been happy to pay Macaulay's fare back to Crieff, provided he were to leave at half-time - and take Buchanan with him!

Coming forward, Ness had been every bit as combative and inventive as Carloway, but in the final third of the field nowhere near as deadly. The opening pace in the second half was less hectic, no doubt a reflection on the aggregate score. In 53 minutes Macaulay supplied "Laxay" on the right but his attempted cross was blocked for a corner, from which "Dokus" delivered high towards the far post, but Stuart "Bubble's" header was safely held by Morrison.

Suddenly the keeper had a double-chance to shine. In 58 minutes "Squegg" controlled a difficult, bouncing clearance just inside the left of the Carloway half, before freeing the unmarked "Bubble" down the left and into the Ness box. Unexpectedly, he checked square inwards, then slipped the ball to Buchanan to his right, but Morrison read his stab excellently, to make an excellent block to his right. A minute later it was "Dokus's" turn to come through the middle, then send Buchanan wide on the right into the Niseach box, but again the young keeper reacted well to get his left foot to Buchanan's instant right-footer and deflect it high over his own bar.

However, he could do nothing on the hour, when a Maciver challenge on the left centre line rebounded high forward for Macaulay and "Bubble" to break behind the line. The Aths' man carried it into the box, then flighted the neatest of lob-shots over Morrison and into his top-left corner (2-5).

Six minutes later, the awakened Carloway concluded their purple period, with, arguably, the goal of the night. "Bubble" did a fair impression of Thierry Henry, twisting and turning through the centre past three defenders, before supplying "Dokus", who lifted a high ball rightwards and forwards for the racing Buchanan to move down the right, then inwards across two defenders and into the box. A trademark check wrong-footed the defenders, and he whistled outwards diagonally round the line towards the corner flag. He reached 10 metres from the goal-line before sending in a vicious low, squared cross which allowed "Dokus" to reprise "Titch's" class act of the first half as he rushed in to meet it directly in front of Morrison and thwack it first-time into the roof of the net (2-6).

So far as the Blues were concerned now, it was a case of "*Job done*", and every available substitute was used in the latter half of the second half, but reputation drove the Niseachs on. In 69 minutes a Harris free-kick, 22 metres out on the left, was reverse-headed back across goal, but Calum Vann's effort from 18 metres ended up in the ozone layer.

They were rewarded in 81 minutes when a long forward ball from Calum Vann, on the right touch-line in the centre, found "Titch" exploding into the box behind Mackay and "Laxay" to nod downwards and past the charging keeper's left, then flick the ball home as it raced past Maclennan's left-hand post (3-6).

Moments later, an incredible melée in the Blues' box began with "Bubble", 10 metres out by Carloway's left-hand post, twisting round to shoot. Mackay blocked; Maclennan pushed away another "Bubble" shot from the rebound; the ball broke rightwards, ricocheting back and forth, before Carloway managed to break out in numbers, at speed down the right, through Stuart "Bubble". He wall-passed to "Dokus" before running the length of the field, eventually cutting into the Ness box to beat the approaching keeper to his right, but Neil Morrison got back in time to block the ball high to the left of his bar.

However, the agony wasn't quite over for the Niseachs. In 87 minutes, after a Johnson attempt from the edge of the box was beaten out by Maclennan, the ball was rapidly switched right, where "Laxay", midway within his own half, sent a long, straight ball forward. "Titch", on the centre line, got his head to it but only succeeded in knocking it backwards over Neil Morrison, to allow Buchanan to race in behind him and into the right of the box. The hapless Morrison once more rushed out, but before he could compose himself, the striker had already sent the ball whizzing past him, low to his left (3-7).

There was a final moment of instinctive artistry to come. In added-on time, a

Niseach attack broke down and Maclennan came to the edge of his area to throw the ball out to the left. A misplaced square pass, 22 metres from the bye-line, suddenly arrived at “Bubble’s” feet, and without hesitation, he whirled round and sent the sweetest of long-range lob-shots over the stranded keeper and home (4-7).

**Full-time: Ness 4 Carloway 7**

A memorable night for the Blues and their fans; less so, for the Niseachs, although all present, in retrospect, probably admire the cool expertise demonstrated by Jack Buchanan. In fact, all of the goals were crackers, in their own way, and there were eleven of them. However, it’s difficult to accept that when seven of them end up in your net.

The difference between the sides tonight was the same as it had been in their two previous meetings this Season: what happened in the final third of the field. Na Gormaich looked dangerous every time they came forward; Ness, only occasionally. Possession of an ace target man, a cool assassin, was key, as it had been when “Frazmac” first arrived at Cnoc a’Choilch, to complete in spectacular fashion all the excellent promise that the Blues had been exhibiting for the previous few seasons, out of defence and into midfield.

An excellent Niseach midfield - Johnson/“Titch”/“Bubble”/Russell-Smith - repeatedly loaded the gun but no one was around to fire it – except themselves, of course, when they had the chance. Having a hit man like Buchanan naturally has the knock-on effect of making him a magnet for opposing defenders, causing opposing back-lines to lose shape in pursuit of a single, threatening attacker, hence allowing regular sights of goal for others coming forward in support. Na Gormaich weren’t exactly convincing themselves at the back tonight, but then they appeared at times to be playing in the Brazilian style, circa 60s-70s, unbothered by the loss of the odd goal, because of a suffocating confidence that, hey, they'd score more. Mild arrogance, of course, won’t be possible on August 8th, when the Blues have yet another chance to slay the dragon and finally land the EaF. However, the odds of that occurring, on tonight’s evidence, seem sound.

**Ness Man of the Match: Andrew “Bubble” Macleod.**

**Carloway Man of the Match: Jack Buchanan (jointly with Scott Macaulay, if possible).**

*\* Not exactly sure of the Ness starting line-up.*