

ABC CUP Round 1:

Carloway 0 (0) Point 0 (0) (after extra-time) (Carloway win 4-2 on penalties).

At Cnoc a' Choilich, Carloway.

Friday, 10.4.14.

Referee: Calum "Chancey" Macleod.

Stand-side line judge: Neil Macritchie.

Far-side line judge: Paul Forster'

CARLOWAY.

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

In charge tonight: Kenny John MacIennan)

Gordon Craigie

*Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Norman "Taz" Morrison
Kevin "Barra" Macneil Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Billy Anderson ■ Ross Maciver Ali
"Laxay" Macdonald*

Jack Buchanan Josh Harris

*Subs.used: Kenny (Beag) MacIennan (Jack Buchanan) 77; Kyle Brunton (Billy Anderson) 99;
Mark Macleod (Ross Maciver) 112.*

Subs.not used: Chris "Christy" Smith; Joe Armstrong.

Yellow card: Billy Anderson 89.

POINT.

Manager: Angus "Stoodie" Mackay.

*Ali "Wally" Maciver Andrew Murray Sam Macsween
Alex Macdonald Donald "Spike" Smith (capt.) Elliot Rudall ■ Stephen Kettings
Andrew "Mowgli" Macleod Stuart Flower ■ Alistair Gillies
Alex Wright*

Subs. used: Duncan Hunter.

Yellow cards: Elliot Rudall 90+1; Stuart Flower 93.

The earth turns; the days lengthen; and the football season returns to the island, slightly diminished, of course, by the demise of Harris. However, the Hearachs' misfortune, hopefully only for a season or so, has benefitted a hard-pressed Carloway squad, who are delighted to add defender, Norman

“Taz” Morrison, and midfielder, Ally “Laxay” Macdonald, to their depleted ranks, the latter well-known to Blues’ fans from his EaF contributions last season.

Lady Fortune has not looked kindly on na Gormaich in the last few months: Fraser “Frazmac” Macleod and Archie “Uibhisteach” MacDonald have left the island; playmaker, Dan Crossley, is out for the season as he awaits a knee operation, after injury in the HAC final; while the team’s central pillar of defence, Iain Angus “Gus” Maciver, has been forced to retire, after sustaining serious injury at Ness in late July, 2014. His loss to the squad is unquantifiable, his presence generating confidence throughout the team, especially among its younger members. Donald “D.I.” MacIennan and Cameron “Tiger” MacArthur have matured rapidly as players, due to his encouragement and support, and his departure places an even heavier burden on Domhnall Mackay to inspire and drive the Blues forward.

The game itself was a re-run of the ABC Cup Round 2 contest at Garrabost a year ago, when a late Ally “Wally” Maciver counter had appeared to cancel out the weirdest of up-and-under-and-ins by Murdo “Sqweg” Macleod and sent the sides into extra-time, only for a wonder 91st minute strike from the tie’s star performer, Billy Anderson, to send Carloway, rather fortunately, into the Semi-Final. Astonishingly, only FOUR of that starting line-up at Point started tonight, although Kenny “Dokus” Macdonald, Josh Harris, Gordon Craigie, and Chris “Christy” Smith had featured on the bench. In addition to the exodus named above, the walking wounded tonight included David Beaton, Lee Johnson (hamstring), Donald “D.I.” MacIennan (knee); and Murdo “Sqweg” Macleod (ankle). So while the ex-Harris boys covered the left flank, opportunity knocked for youth to shine, with Kevin “Barra” Macneil starting at right half/wing; Ross Maciver joining “Dokus” and Billy Anderson in the engine room; and Josh Harris partnering Jack Buchanan up front. Kyle Brunton, Mark Macleod and Joe Armstrong awaited the call from the touch-line. The cellar door was guarded by Craigie, “Tiger”, and Mackay, giving na Gormaich a passing resemblance to *“Dads’ Army meets the In-Betweeners”*.

Another regular feature of the local game turned up: a howling westerly, which, together with the low evening sun, added to the Blues’ woes as they faced the daunting prospect of neutralizing a strengthened Rubhach side. Mo Khalil may have headed west but a Sam Macsween/ Andie Murray/ Ally “Wally” Maciver attack force, driven relentlessly forward by Elliot Rudall (ex-Athletic) and Donald “Spike” Smith, soon menaced Craigie, in his 25th season between the sticks.

The gale soon proved more hindrance than help, however. In the early stages it drove Point forward relentlessly, first Macsween forcing a corner on the

right, then “Wally” on the left, but a subsequent series of corners misjudged the wind and most flew high over. On 7 minutes, a delicately flighted free-kick from Anderson, after “Dokus” was held back just inside the Rubhach half on the right touchline, was turned across and away from goal by the westerly.

Two minutes later a golden opportunity dropped from the heavens for the Rubhachs: a short goal-kick from Craigie straight out 22 metres to “Taz” seemed to surprise the defender, who got in a fankle and was instantly robbed by Murray. As the striker sped into the box, Craigie was out like a flash to expertly block as the hit-man delayed just that instant too long, and Mackay reacted sharply to get back to clear the deflected ball, as it drifted towards the line. On 18 minutes another Point surge saw the irrepressible “Wally” feed Macsween to rush in on the right but again that moment’s delay to get the perfect angle allowed “Taz” to get in a brilliant sliding block for a corner, which was then headed just over by Rudall, in the centre, from 16 metres.

The pattern was set: Macsween lay wide on the right, while Murray and Maciver roamed freely; Rudall and “Spike” pressed on Anderson and Maciver through the centre, and Andrew “Mowgli” Macleod (ex-Back) pushed forward to assist Macdonald on the left. “Dokus”, after a quiet start, was elbowed wide to the right and repeatedly sought, with Anderson’s support, to initiate attacking moves, especially down the right to “Barra”. However, the latter was kept deep by “Mowgli’s” pressure, and Buchanan and Harris, though they ran and ran, lacked balls at feet and could not get close enough to goal to trouble a keeper like Wright.

On 31 minutes another golden chance arrived for Point as Macsween received the ball through the middle from Kettings, 22 metres out, and immediately hook-flicked the ball straight onwards to “Wally”, ghosting behind Mackay and inside “Taz”. Again Van Der Sar was alive to the threat and made himself big, 16 metres out, and the ball flashed off him wide for the umpteenth Point corner. As the half concluded, Carlway finally created a definite chance. “Dokus’s” persistence won him the ball in the centre, just inside the Point half, and he set off on a trademark leftwards dribbling run to the line. 12 metres out, on the edge of the area, he whipped in a vicious low diagonal, which Buchanan read brilliantly to ghost across Flower to meet by the near post. However, the stopper reacted decisively to block the shot with an exquisite last-minute tackle, and Wright rushed out to boot the loose, spinning ball as far as Brue.

Half-time: Carloway 0 Point 0

What could Kenny change? None of the players had been posted missing;

the defence was immense; the older, experienced players: Craigie, Mackay, "Dokus", and Anderson were leading by example; the newcomers had slotted in seamlessly; and the younger members of the squad had plenty of appetite for the play. As a team, however, they seemed mainly "*on the back foot*" to a more cohesive, faster-reacting machine, whose only weakness was an inability to be more incisive with their chances. Nevertheless, one man's (or team's) misfortune is another's good luck.

On 52 minutes injury forced Andrew Murray to be stretchered off and the three-pronged Rubhach attack was diminished slightly. On 63 minutes the pacy Macsween managed to elude "Taz" down the right but his waist-high diagonal, 16 metres from the bye-line, was blocked by Mackay at the near post, then spun awkwardly inwards towards goal, where Craigie read it easily.

After the hour the pace had noticeably accelerated; the shape of the game become less defined, and the marking looser, as both sides strove to clinch the tie in 90 minutes, but still the balance of territory and possession favoured the Reds. On 65 minutes another elusive run arrived from "Dokus", winning the ball rightwards just inside the Point half, then turning and feinting past two opponents, but at the crucial moment, on the edge of the box, the ball bobbed and his shot took off wildly like a Halloween rocket. A minute later Macsween, 14 metres out by Craigie's left-hand post, just failed to get on the end of a glorious low squared cross from the left from Maciver.

On 75 minutes "Taz" blocked Macsween's drive from the right bye-line and yet another series of Point corners pressurized the Blues, but committed defence still denied the Rubhachs any sight of goal. Then Maciver trickery on the left took him past "Barra" and "Tiger" to the bye-line but his high cross was held at full stretch by the near post by Craigie. A minute late the indomitable "Wally" cropped up once more, surging behind Mackay and inside "Taz", on to a through ball from Flower and into the right of the Blues' box. As Craigie advanced, he lifted the ball carefully over the advancing keeper, but as it bounced gently past the far post, Craigie was able to get back smartly to block the arriving Macdonald's sliding effort low inside his right-hand corner.

The final half-chances came in the 81st minute when Craigie once more had to look alert to block a low dangerous cross from the breaking "Wally" on the left, and this was closely followed by a "Dokus" free-kick from 24 metres clearing the bar by a metre.

Full-time: Carloway 0 (0) Point 0 (0)

Well, this was exactly what no one, player and spectator alike, wanted: another 30 minutes' play for 22-plus exhausted players in cold, blustery

conditions and fading light. If this had been Lords, not Cnoc a' Choilich, the contest would have been stopped because of bad light. Naturally the pace dropped appreciably and each side only managed to create one further chance apiece. On 95 minutes the Rubhachs broke down the left, and 18 metres from the bye-line, Maciver's hip-high cross was flicked on neatly by Macdonald, but Craigie dropped on it low to his right. On 108 minutes a "Dokus" corner on Wright's right skided onwards off a Point head, 12 metres out by the near post, straight to Mackay, but the whistling pace of the ball carried it too fast to him and he powered his reverse header 2 metres past Wright's right-hand post.

After extra-time: Carloway 0 (0) Point 0 (0)

PENALTIES: Carloway went first.

<u>CARLOWAY</u>		<u>POINT</u>	
✓ Kevin "Barra" Macneil scores	1-0	✗ Elliot Rudall misses	1-0
✗ Domhnall Mackay saved by Alex Wright	1-0	✓ Ally "Wally" Maciver scores	1-1
✓ Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald scores	2-1	✗ Alex Macdonald saved by Gordon Craigie	
2-1			
✓ Kyle Brunton scores	3-1	✓ Alistair Gillies scores	3-
2			
✓ Josh Harris scores	4-2		

Elimination by penalties doubtless had the Rubhachs shaking their heads in disbelief, and wondering how on earth they managed to let this one slip through their hands. They didn't dominate the match, but essentially controlled the shape of the play for lengthy periods and created at least half a dozen, maybe more, clear-cut chances, a few of them directly in front of goal. However, a mixture of carelessness, bad luck, and superlative goalkeeping denied "Wally", Macdonald, and Murray.

It's the oldest refrain in any sport, indeed in life itself: if you don't take your chances while you're ahead - well, you know the rest. "Tiger", Mackay, and "Taz" did not weaken throughout - unfortunately for na Gormaich, neither did Kettings, Flower, Gillies, and "Mowgli" - but midfield colossi, "Dokus" and Billy Anderson, assisted by Maciver, struggled in twin roles: combatting Smith's and Rudall's aggression in midfield, whilst trying to release "Barra" rightwards and Buchanan/ Harris in the left/centre. Hence chances came rarely for the Blues, and only one or two "Maybes" occurred, with Jack Buchanan's effort just before half-time the best, perhaps only, opportunity. Wright simply had to remain alert, not inspired.

Craigie, in contrast, was immense and was a living illustration of the old proverb, "There's many a good tune played on an old fiddle". In fact, like fine

clarets which mature with age, Mackay, Anderson, “Dokus”, and Craigie all defied the years and turned in vintage performances: holding the line; in unarmed combat in defence and midfield; and persistently seeking to provide the match-winning passes, the supply of that killer ball, to the ever-eager “Barra”, Buchanan, and Harris. Next Friday’s League game at home against the ever-lethal Lochs may prove a more testing encounter, however.

Carloway Man of the Match: Gordon Craigie.

Point Man of the Match: Ally “Wally” Maciver.