

ABC CUP Semi-Final:

Ness 1 (1) Carloway 1 (1) (after extra-time) (Carloway win 4-1

on penalties).

Craig Harris pen. 35 Jack Buchanan 26

At Fivepenny.

Monday, 20.4.14.

Referee: D.J. Maclean (Bragar).

Stand-side line judge: David "Spider" Macleod.

Far-side line judge: Stuart Macleod.

CARLOWAY.

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

Gordon Craigie

*Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur ■ Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Phil Macleod
Kevin "Barra" Macneil Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald ■ Kyle Brunton Billy Anderson ■ Ali "Laxay"
Macdonald*

Jack Buchanan Josh Harris

Subs.used: Lee Johnson (Kyle Brunton) 77; Chris "Christy" Smith (Jack Buchanan) 86.

Subs.not used: Ross "Tiny" Maclean; Stuart "Gochan" Macleod; Joe Armstrong.

Yellow cards: Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald 64; Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur 87

Red card: Billy Anderson 115

Once the first whistle is blown, there is no respite in the Lewis and Harris football season. The list of upcoming fixtures is unremitting, especially if a team is fortunate enough to win a few Cup games. Carloway's win against Point meant a journey to Fivepenny tonight to earn a place in the first cup final of the new season, allowing little time to ruminate on solutions to their attacking difficulties. There were more immediate concerns for the managerial team. The injury list had eased slightly, with Lee Johnson, ex-Ness stalwart, risking an appearance tonight on the substitutes' bench. There was also the good news that Donald "D.I." Maclelland would begin training next week. However, to add to the absences of David Beaton (hamstring), Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod (knee), and Dan Crossley (knee), Kenny "Beag" Maclelland had returned to work off-island and Norman "Taz" Morrison was off on a 4-week work course in Fife. David "Lurch" Murray, Ross Maciver, and Mark Macleod were unavailable, so a certain amount of jiggery-pokery was necessary by Graeme "Windy" Miller to cover all the bases.

Unfortunately, central midfield was affected as Phil Macleod retreated left to cover for "Taz", with Kyle Brunton coming in to fill the gap, and Josh Harris, another ex-Niseach, started once more beside Jack Buchanan. Chris "Christy" Smith and Joe Armstrong again graced the bench, and were joined by young stars, Ross "Tiny" Maclean and Stuart "Gochan" Macleod, younger brother of the mercurial Kevin, himself only willing to play occasionally, if required, for the Blues.

Ness were much changed: Johnny Wallace, of course, has returned to Westside, but also gone are Scott Macrury, Domhnall Gillies, Iain "Cheeks" Morrison, and James "Titch" Morrison. In addition, tonight, to Carloway's glee, there was no sign of star performers, Micheil Russell-Smith or Andrew "Bubble" Macleod, either, though Jamie Feeney had arrived from United, and Innes Smith and Calum "Dola" Morrison had also enlisted, with Gordon Kennedy (ex-Westside) between the sticks.

Carloway were aiming for their third successive ABC Cup Final appearance, having lost 0-5 last season to deadly rivals, Westside, and won it for the first time in 2013, 6-0, against Back. Attacking displays in their first two games this season may not have been encouraging, but the omens were promising, with their record over the last decade against Ness showing a lead of 25-4 in victories.

A reasonable crowd attended on a pleasant, clear Spring night, as the Blues faced into the low evening sun. Mindful of their two previous outings, Carloway did not make the initial mistake of allowing their opponents to dictate the pace and pattern of the tie by opting for a holding/breaking strategy. After an initial Niseach flurry which ended with Craig Harris turning into the box and shooting low, straight to Craigie, Anderson and "Dokus" managed to impose themselves in their midfield contest with Ali Morrison, Harris, *et al*, and utilize the pace and spread of Buchanan and Josh Harris to test Neil Morrison, "Dola", and Feeney.

On 7 minutes "Barra" retreated into his own half on the right touch-line to receive from "Tiger", then eluded Maciver to transfer onwards down the right to the fast-breaking Harris. The young star carried the ball into the Ness box, but under pressure from "Dola" could only drive into the near side-netting from 16 metres. Ness responded immediately with a quick break on the right; the ball was then played back to midway within the Blues' half, on the right touch-line, but the diagonal cross in was headed out towards the centre. On 22 metres an attacker (no.17?) tried his luck but his effort almost hit Skylab.

On 19 minutes the ever-eager Josh Harris was sent through the centre into the left of the box by a "Dokus" defence-splitter straight forward, but Feeney and Neil Morrison managed to crowd the striker and his weakened daisy-cutter from 16 metres was saved by Kennedy, down smartly to his right. However, on 26 minutes na Gormaich finally edged the breakthrough, though in the weirdest of circumstances. As Carloway repelled a Niseach attack out of defence, Anderson

was supplied in the centre circle and flighted an inviting ball over the retreating back-line for Buchanan and Harris to run on to. A stramash developed in the Ness box and out of this fankle the ball was booted out for a throw-in on the Blues' left.

The resulting cross was then cleared away for a Carloway corner on Kennedy's right. Anderson's corner was half-met by a collection of heads towards the near post and carried on to the far post where "Barra" just got his head to it, but it broke high behind him. He turned swiftly, gathered it, then whipped round to unleash a half-hit effort which trundled slowly to Kennedy. The goalkeeper's reaction was perplexing, as if his mind had gone blank. On the goal-line, instead of picking it up, he tapped it to the right with his left foot, then knocked it out weakly with his right. Buchanan managed to overcome the general astonishment first, and from 12 metres stroked the ball strongly into the bottom left corner of the net (**0-1**).

Yet another goal to remember at Fivepenny, to add to Dan Crossley's amazing 24-metre rocket in July 2013 which bewildered Ross Morrison and Domhnall Cheocaidh's incredible up-and-under over Craigie in August 2009.

Naturally, it took Ness a few minutes to regain their equilibrium after this stunner and it was 29 minutes before Craigie had to move smartly to palm away from under his bar a difficult corner from his left. The ball broke out to the right corner of his box where "Dola" lurked. He didn't connect properly but Craigie still had to get down to push away his deceptive effort for a corner, low at the bottom right-hand corner of his goal.

On 35 minutes a stroke of luck restored equality for the Niseachs. A break on the Niseach right saw them make the bye-line, just inside the Carloway box. The winger attempted to flick the ball inwards, but it struck the covering Mackay's arm/hand. It was unintentional but it denied the home side an advantage - and the referee decided it did - it was a penalty. Gordon Craigie chose right; Craig Harris struck it firmly, slightly to the keeper's left (**1-1**).

Half-time: Ness 1 Carloway 1

It had been a curiously incident-free first half, with Carloway perhaps edging territory and possession, though Ness were always there. The encouraging aspect of the Blues' performance so far for the travelling fans was a newly-discovered positivity in approach, despite aggressive, combative opponents; a feeling that patient build-up would bring eventual success. However, there had been a marked absence of opportunities at either end, mainly due to dogged, well-organised back-lines, in "Tiger"/Mackay/Macleod and Feeney/Neil Morrison/"Dola". They continued to dominate. In 47 minutes Mackay won the ball on the edge of his area and played a 30-metre pass forward to Buchanan, facing toward him, and he in turn flicked the ball neatly to Anderson on his right. Immediately, the Blue's prime *animateur* found

“Dokus” ahead of him with a perfect defence-splitter but “Dokus” was forced wide to the right and from 18 metres pulled the ball across goal and beyond the far post.

In 58 minutes Ness reciprocated when John Alexander Maciver, on the left touch-line, midway within the Carloway half, set up Harris in the centre, 24 metres out, but his measured right-footer flew straight to Craigie. Five minutes later another chance for Ness saw a “Dola” free-kick, from midway within the opposition half, 10 metres from the right touch-line, met by Maciver 14 metres out by the far post, but his looping header cleared the bar by a couple of metres.

As the clock advanced, the pace quickened, tempers grew shorter, as both sides tried to settle it before extra-time. In 66 minutes an Anderson free-kick on the Ness right, midway within their half, was headed out by Neil Morrison, but came straight to “Dokus” on the right edge of the box. However, his first-time effort just crept low past Kennedy’s right-hand post. The next real chance did not arrive till the 83rd minute when Anderson, on the left of the centre line, released Harris into the box, but his square pass across goal, 12 metres out, though it eluded Kennedy, was booted clear at the far post. Immediately, the Niseachs replied with a “Dola” free-kick on the left touch-line, just inside the Carloway half. Craigie had to react swiftly to block by his right-hand post, and the ball was scooped away by “Tiger” from an approaching attacker.

In the dying seconds both sides had a chance to spare their suffering fans thirty more minutes of tension: in the 89th minute, Mackay won the ball in his own half on the left and played it forward to “Dokus”, free to the left of Feeney. He made the edge of the area, before cutting the ball across the area, well-wide of the goalkeeper, but beyond the far post. Then, in added-on time, the Blues issued a collective sigh of relief when a Smith free-kick from 24 metres cleared the Carloway bar by a metre.

Full-time: Ness 1 (1) Carloway 1 (1)

The pace in extra-time didn’t noticeably drop as desperation to avoid the dreaded penalty shoot-out energized tired limbs, though free-kicks multiplied. In the 93rd minute a “Dokus” free-kick in the centre flew well over from 24 metres. A minute later a Phil Macleod corner on Kennedy’s left was headed in strongly by Mackay, from 12 metres by the near post but the keeper managed to claw it away to his right. In the 97th minute Carloway once more forced themselves forward down the right, “Christy” in the centre in his own half finding “Barra” moving into the Niseach half. The wing-man transferred the early ball straight onwards to Harris, who reached the outside of the box, then cut a low square ball across goal behind the retreating defence, but “Dokus”, arriving late outside the far post, could only whack the ball high, past Kennedy’s left-hand post.

In 106 minutes it was Craig Harris's turn to hit the wall, 20 metres out on the left corner of the Carloway box, and three minutes later Phil Macleod did likewise at the other end, 22 metres out in the centre. The Blues managed to survive the closing drama of the tie when Craig Harris was sent clear into the right of the Carloway box, but he delayed too long, made the angle too tight, and Craigie was allowed to block him well, low by his left-hand post. The rebounding ball then ricocheted around the penalty spot in the Blues' area, before being booted clear.

After extra-time: Ness 1 (1) Carloway 1 (1)

PENALTIES: Carloway went first.

CARLOWAY

✓ *Kevin "Barra" Macneil scores 1-0*

✓ *Domhnall Mackay scores 2-0*

✓ *Lee Johnson scores 3-0*

✓ *Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald scores 4-1*

NESS

✗ *Neil Morrison saved by Gordon Craigie 1-0*

✗ *Craig Harris saved by Gordon Craigie 2-0*

✓ *John Alexander Maciver scores 3-1*

So, 240 minutes and 11 penalties later, Carloway find themselves in their third successive ABC Cup Final, after their 6th straight penalty shoot-out success (7-6 v. Back in the Co-op Cup Final in 2012; 4-3 v. West Side in the Moldova Lewis Cup Final in 2012; 4-2 v. Athletic in the ABC Semi-Final and 3-0 v. Athletic in the Co-op Cup Semi-Final, both in 2014; and the two this season already in the ABC, 4-2 v. Point in Round 1, and tonight). Quite a record, and many thanks must go to David Beaton and Gordon Craigie for splendid goalkeeping. Note the number of penalties actually saved, not missed.

How fair a method this is to settle closely-fought ties is arguable. There was little to separate the sides tonight; whereas Carloway edged possession, territory and chances in the first hour, once the game heated up, the opportunities to score evened out. The most heartening part of the display tonight was the more positive and assertive aspects of the Blues' play: eager for the ball; an all-round willingness to come forward, to force things. Though John Alexander Mciver made his life difficult, "Barra" was able to play a much more forward role than in the previous games and broadened Carloway's attacking options. This in turn gave more room in central midfield for Billy Anderson and "Dokus" to take an overview of proceedings, improvise and create, with the fast-paced Josh Harris lightening the burden carried up front by Jack Buchanan.

The main problem tonight, however, was not a failure to take chances, but to create chances to take. The Carloway goal, though sharply taken, resulted from a goalkeeping clanger; apart from that, Gordon Kennedy had only to be alert and did not really have a save to make, although there were several close calls. Doubtless, the chance ratio will improve as the machine becomes more finely tuned, hopefully

before May 15th.

Ness Man of the Match: Calum “Dola” Morrison.

Carloway Man of the Match: Domhnall Mackay.