

## Highland Amateur Cup Round 1:

# Carloway 1 (1) Point 4 (2)

Jack Buchanan 34

Alex Lamb 25

Ali "Wally" Maciver 45

Elliot Rudall 90

Alex Macdonald 90+1

At Cnoc a' Choilich.

Friday, 8.5.15.

Referee: D.J.Maclean

Far-side line judge: Paul Forster.

Carloway line judge: Andrew Macleod.

### CARLOWAY.

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

Gordon Craigie

Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur ■ Domhnall Mackay (capt.) ■ Calum Tom Moody ■

Mark "Cirbhig" Macleod Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Chris "Christy" Smith Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod Andrew "Tago" Maciver

Jack Buchanan Lee Johnson

Subs.used: Josh Harris (Lee Johnson) 7; Ross Maciver (Jack Buchanan) 40; Stuart "Gochan" Macleod (Andrew "Tago" Maciver) 64; Joe Armstrong (Josh Harris) 82.

Subs. not used: David "Lurch" Murray.

Yellow cards: Domhnall Mackay (capt.) 44; Calum Tom Moody 66; Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur 89.

### POINT.

Manager: Angus Mackay.

Ali "Wally" Maciver Stewart Munro Sam Macsween

Alex Macdonald Stuart Flower (capt.) Elliot Rudall Stephen Kettings

? Alex Lamb Alistair Gillies

Alex Wright

No doubt the Blues were looking for a continuation of the positivity and grit which characterized the team's performance at Fivepenny last Monday where Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald, Billy Anderson, and Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod had rekindled an old partnership to propel Carloway to their first League victory of the 2015 campaign. Calum Tom Moody's and Lee Johnson's displays had also contributed hugely, and allowed Domhnall Mackay to lead decisively through the centre and this in turn had allowed ace striker, Jack Buchanan, to re-discover in no small measure the appetite he had for the ball in his explosive first season.

Unfortunately, circumstances affected choices tonight: Kevin "Barra" Macneil, of course, had now joined the walking wounded (broken toe), while Billy Anderson, so influential versus the Niseachs, was unavailable, nor did Ali "Laxay" Macdonald feature. So once more team selection became an exercise in jiggery-pokery, the bench resembling Western Thistle, with a cast of Joe Armstrong; the newly-available, Ross Maciver; Josh Harris; Stuart "Gochan" Macleod, and David "Lurch" Murray. However, old favourite,

Andrew "Tago" Maciver, was back on the island and filled "Laxay's" slot, though Chris "Christy" Smith was delegated the unfamiliar role of holding midfielder.

Last season in the corresponding first round, na Gormaich had stumbled to an uncomfortable 4-2 victory at Lionacleit against Barra, before embarking on an exhilarating roller-coaster ride past Athletic (2-0), Culbokie (w.o.), Wick Groats, the holders (3-2); lochdar Saints (2-0), in an electric Semi-Final at Goathill; to the Tulloch Caledonian Stadium in Inverness, where they were a trifle unlucky to fall 1-2 to perennial Cup-Winners, Avoch.

Similar hopes this season seemed rather presumptuous, in view of personnel departures and extensive injuries to the squad. Also, tonight's opponents, Point, were unlikely to be in a forgiving mood after an unlucky exit from the ABC Cup here on penalties, four weeks ago, and a reliance on a late moment of brilliance from Sam Macsween in a League game a fortnight earlier to finally kill off opponents they should really have had buried by half-time. So, the primary problems tonight for the Blues was how to combat the elusive pace merchant, Sam Macsween, and the unquenchable Ali "Wally" Maciver, who both had great fun here in the League fixture; and to sustain an accurate supply of quality ball to Jack Flash and Lee Johnson.

A sizeable crowd was slow to accumulate on a calm, clear evening, although it rapidly became apparent they were unlikely to have lots to cheer about. The Rubhachs immediately resumed the format adopted in their two earlier appearances at Cnoc a' Choilich and surged inexorably towards Gordon Craigie, in an earnest reconstruction of "*Groundhog Day*". Bill Murray should have been at centre-forward. Fortunately for na Gormaich, they also réprised their earlier attempts to enact scenes from "*Zen and the Art of Missing Golden Chances*".

In 7 minutes an exquisite "Wally" ball from midway within the Carloway half found Rudall clear on the left. He had time to control the pass, then move diagonally into the left of the box, but finished weakly with a strike straight at "Van Der Sar" from 16 metres. Four minutes later, a neat move down the right saw Kettings, just inside his own half, play forward to Macsween, who squared immediately for Maciver to release Munro on the right. He made the left of Craigie, 14 metres out, but instead of shooting, he cut square, and a desperate lunge by "Christy" blocked to Craigie. On 15 minutes an inviting "Wally" corner on Craig's right flew across goal unchallenged, just whizzing too fast for Gillies to connect, unmarked in front of goal.

Carloway were drowning: the Craigie/Mackay/Moody nexus was resolute, but "Dokus" and "Sgweg" seemed unsure of their roles within the swirling vortex of midfield and were isolated and by-passed. Smith battled hard but the **totalvoetbal** nature of the Rubhach onslaught posed the question: man-marking or zonal? Do I follow or stay? "Tiger" simply could not get a foot in against "Wally", and this repeatedly dragged Mackay wide on his right to cover, while "Tago" clung to Macsween, further weakening a barely-functioning midfield, as Smith felt it necessary to move continually in support.

In 25 minutes the inevitable break-through arrived. The umpteenth Point corner from “Wally”, on Craigie’s left, was swung high outwards, where a surprised Lamb was given all the time in the world to meet it with a looping header, 16 metres out in the centre, and send a looping header high into the top right corner of Craigie’s net (**0-1**).

Three minutes later it could have been two, as Mackay, racing back on the right edge of the Blues’ box, just pipped “Wally” to tip the ball back to the advancing keeper. However, Craigie had expected the ball to run untouched to him, was wrong-footed, and had to dive desperately at the feet of a fast-reacting “Wally”. The ball rebounded across goal, but Mackay recovered brilliantly to slide-tackle the follow-up from Munro, and send the ball spinning off for a corner.

Then, suddenly, Carloway astonished themselves by equalising, and on the end of a brilliant counter-attack. Another “Wally” corner on Craigie’s left was headed straight back out by Moody by the near post and Harris won a tussle with “Wally” in the corner to speed forward down the left and send the early ball to “Dokus”, moving into the Rubhach half. He, in turn, sent the breaker inside Kettings, wide of Gillies, for Buchanan, to race forward. Twenty metres from the bye-line and 5 metres in from the touch-line, he performed his trademark check, then cut in square to his right, and let loose a right-foot daisy cutter. Wright had advanced to spread but the shot took a nasty swerve to his left, resisted his blocking feet, and powered into the net (**1-1**).

Traffic, however, still flowed relentlessly towards Craigie. In 40 minutes a “Wally” free-kick, 22 metres out on the Carloway right, was delivered up-and-under style across the face of the Blues’ goal, but everyone failed to connect, and it flashed two metres past Craigie’s left-hand post. Then, on the stroke of half-time, “Wally” finally hit the mark with yet another free-kick, after Mackay had clobbered Kettings on the edge of the box: dead centre, and just outside the Carloway box, he sent a glorious “Dokus” special just over the left of the wall and just inside Craigie’s left-hand post (**1-2**).

**Half-time: Carloway 1 Point 2**

It was difficult to envisage any constructive way back for Carloway here. Given the personnel available, the task seemed insurmountable. A steadfast defence was in danger of being swamped, especially wide; a floundering midfield had failed to function as a unit and were unable to confront their opposite numbers in any unified manner; and both first-choice attackers had departed. With “Dokus” and “Sqweg” battling to establish footholds in midfield, there was little support for the inexperienced, and what resulted was a series of individuals racing around in search of aimless balls forward.

Immediately “Wally” escaped again down the right, off a searching diagonal from Flowers. He made the right bye-line, but his fast, squared cross found no takers. On 59 minutes a “Wally” free-kick, 22 metres out on the right, was flighted in delicately, taking a nasty deflection off Mackay, on the penalty spot,

but was safely gathered by Craigie.

The flow was relentless: a minute later a Point surge through the middle, saw Flower send yet another perfect diagonal breaker wide of Mackay, behind "Tiger", for Munro to break into the left of the Blues' box, but Craigie was alive to the danger, and was out like lightning to block the low strike from 16 metres with his right foot. In 68 minutes a through ball from the centre-line by Flowers led to a pin-ball skirmish on the centre edge of the Carloway box, the ball skittering square to the the Blues' right. It was swiftly seized on by the predatory Macsween, who moved rapidly to his left into the box but delayed that moment too long, allowing the retreating Harris to get a foot in for a corner.

Then, suddenly, na Gormaich had two opportunities to punish their profligate opponents. In 71 minutes a "Sqweg" corner on the barely-awake Wright's left broke out to "Cirbhig" in the centre, but his snapshot right-footer cleared the bar by a metre. Two minutes later, against the run of play, Carloway almost equalized! A quick break down the right saw "Dokus" supply Harris, just in from the touch-line, moving to the edge of the box. Lamb immediately closed him down and he played the ball straight back to the approaching "Sqweg", who did not hesitate and whacked an instant right-foot special from 30 metres, just in from Point's left touch-line. Wright could only watch as the ball whistled and swerved high to his right, clipped the outside of his bar/post, and travelled on at Mach 10 to Knock.

The Rubhachs were momentarily unnerved and took a collective step backwards, allowing Mackay and Moody to take alternate forays forward to activate their porous midfield. However, this in turn facilitated the fast break forward from Macsween and "Wally", with support from Flower and Macdonald, and they repeatedly tugged a thin back line wide. In 77 minutes a fast Macsween break on the right led to "Wally" swinging in another beautiful corner which Gillies met directly in front of goal, 12 metres out, but he headed it high past Craigie's right-hand post. An unholy melée followed a minute later in the left of the Carloway box, before the ball was scrambled away for another corner.

Then just as Carloway appeared to have escaped with an honourable defeat, Point struck twice in two minutes at the death: first, a "Wally" free-kick, midway within the Blues' half, towards the right cleared everyone to reach Rudall by the back post, allowing him to reverse-head the ball high into Craigie's left-hand corner (**1-3**).

From the kick-off, the ball was played back to the right, where suicidal triangular play between "Tiger", Maciver, and "Cirbhig" saw the ball snapped up by a grateful Macdonald who charged forward to free "Wally". He drew Mackay to the edge of the box, then played back to the fast arriving Macdonald who did not hesitate but crashed an unsaveable shot high into Craigie's right-hand net (**1-4**).

**Full-time: Carloway 1 (1) Point 4 (2)**

When a professional side's fortunes take a downturn and it is less successful than in the years just past, they usually say they are "*rebuilding*". That's why the likes of Arsenal have been "*rebuilding*" for about twenty years. Bertie Vogts was permanently "*rebuilding*". Carloway are clearly not the side they were in 2013. Who would be after the departures of Iain Angus "Gus" Maciver, Dan Crossley, Seumas Macleod, Scott Macaulay, *et al*? An extensive injury cohort has further decimated options. A Chelsea or Man. Utd. would simply solve squad problems by spending several million pounds. Such an option is not available to any island team, and the young increasingly are asked to step in, unprepared, to cover short-term or long-term. So, in a sense, Carloway are "*rebuilding*", and the quality of the newcomers is promising, but requires support and experience.

Tonight, however, the lack of shape in midfield, due to facing off against confident, well-organized opponents, generalised expertly by Stuart Flower centrally; plus, a clear uncertainty about the roles assigned to compensate for a lack of experienced squad regulars, spelled disaster. Thankfully, Domhnall Mackay, Calum Tom Moody, and Gordon Craigie were as resilient as ever, but there is only so long crack defenders can keep their fingers in the dyke, and without the wide support of "Barra" and "Laxay" or the ebullient presence of *force majeure*, Billy Anderson, in the centre, "Dokus" and "Sqweg" were increasingly left like passers-by caught in a flash flood. This in turn condemned the young-bloods - "Cirbhig", Ross Maciver, and "Gochan" to a lack of guidance and support, which, of course, is a primary element of "*rebuilding*".

**Carloway Man of the Match: Domhnall Mackay.**

**Point Man of the Match: Ali "Wally" Maciver.**