

Jock Stein Cup Round 1 :

Lochs 1 (0) Carloway 0 (0)

Robert Mackenzie 83

At Creagan Dubh, Leurbost.

Monday, 11.5.14.

Referee: D.J. Maclean.

Lochs line judge: Calum Murdo Mackenzie.

Carloway line judge: Kevin Anderson.

CARLOWAY.

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

Gordon Craigie

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

Mark Macleod Rab Maciver Billy Anderson Andrew "Tago" Maciver ■ Ali "Laxay" Macdonald

Kevin "Barra" Macneil Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald

Subs.used: Stuart "Gochan" Macleod (Mark Macleod) 75; Joe Armstrong (Ali "Laxay" Macdonald) 85; David Bowen (Rab Maciver) 89.

Subs. not used: David "Lurch" Murray; Graham Macdonald.

Yellow cards: Andrew "Tago" Maciver 28; Domhnall Mackay 88.

LOCHS.

Manager: David Macmillan.

Jim O'Donnell Robert Jones

Andy Murray David Macmillan Robert Mackenzie Angie Campbell

Daniel "Nipper" Mackenzie Donald "Nomie" Macdonald Graeme Mackenzie Peter Mackenzie

James Macleod

Subs.used: Craig Maclean (Peter Mackenzie) 67; Roddy Morrison (Daniel "Nipper" Mackenzie) 88.

Sub. not used: Gordon "Gordie" Mackenzie.

Creagan Dubh tonight resembled the planet in the film "Alien" or even more so, Goose Bay, Labrador, the stop-over for Transatlantic jets, as the teams were blasted onfield by a gale-force south-easterly that seemed capable of lifting Leurbost Community Centre all the way to Sula Sgeir. The option had been there to delay the fixture to Wednesday but Friday's ABC Final had rather stymied that. The cards that Providence had dealt the Blues were unpromising: Jack Buchanan was out with a heavily-bruised ankle, while Lee Johnson and Josh Harris suffered from hamstring problems; Calum Tom Moody and Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod were also unavailable. Extremely unfortunate when a side has to face bookies' favourites for all island tournaments this season, Lochs, even stronger-looking this evening than they had been in the mid-April League game at Cnoc a' Choilich when they triumphed by a Robert Jones goal.

James Macleod (ex-Back) replaced David Black in goal, while Craig Maclean was relegated to the bench to allow Jim O'Donnell to partner Jones in attack. Hammer of the Blues, Peter Mackenzie, returned at right wing/back, but fortunately for na Gormaich, the explosive Johnny Smith has departed. With class *animateurs*, Andy Murray and Angie Campbell, replacing Peter Robbie Mackenzie and Steven Price on either flank, the whole outfit simply oozed with menace, experience, and class. Luckily for the Blues, midfield dynamo, Billy Anderson, featured, and the dependable

Ali "Laxay" Macdonald and Kevin "Barra" Macneil returned in left midfield and right-sided attack. Andrew "Tago" Maciver was still on the island and slotted in inside "Laxay", allowing "Dokus" to move forward into Buchanan's position. To Anderson's right, the elegant Rab Maciver, newly acquired from Point although he has Carloway credentials as a grandson of Domhnall Shuffair, débuted, while David Bowen made his first appearance, on the bench alongside David "Lurch" Murray, Joe Armstrong, Stuart "Gochan" Macleod, and Graham Macdonald. On paper, this appeared an imposing side - against anyone but the Maroons that is - but the Carloway support were unlikely to expect tonight to be a barrel of laughs.

As expected, from the whistle, Carloway took one step back and spread, as Lochs immediately settled into their traditional pass/move/pass La Liga-style, presenting the Blues with the instant questions: zonal- or man-marking; if the latter, who marks whom? How far do you follow them, etc., etc., etc.? From the kick-off, Robert Mackenzie played his namesake, Peter, into the right of the Carloway half and his diagonal cross broke off "Laxay" for the first corner of the tie within the first minute. Three minutes later the same player sent a free-kick from the same position but Mackay beat Jones to it to head clear.

The pressure continued and in 7 minutes a through ball from Robert Mackenzie, on the centre-line, broke awkwardly off the intercepting Mackay and Jones managed to wriggle round him to the bye-line, 18 metres from goal. His measured chip inwards was met by Macmillan, clear in front of goal, 12 metres out, to loop a reverse-header past the wrong-footed Craigie, but the ball struck the top of the Carloway left-hand post and was swept away by the arriving Smith.

Two minutes later na Gormaich tested Macleod for the first time but Anderson's ambitious 35-metre free-kick cleared the bar by a metre. Directly from the goal-kick, Macmillan gathered the ball in the centre circle and sent a glorious splitter between Mackay and "Tiger" for Jones to ghost through into the box, but as Craigie rushed out, he hesitated and a chasing "Tiger" slid in with a goal-saving block, 12 metres from goal. Three minutes later, yet another Macmillan free-kick, 20 metres out to the right of the box, cleared the bar by a foot. In 16 minutes Jones was once more free on the right off Robert Mackenzie, and 20 metres from the bye-line squared to Macmillan but his instant drive lost its power as it was deflected straight to Craigie.

Immediately, Carloway had their best move of the game, as Mackay found Anderson in the centre circle, and his flick on to "Dokus" was instantly moved diagonally right to the charging "Tago" behind "Nipper". He made the left of the Lochs' box, but "Nomie" blocked his attempt away for a corner. The Blues continued to be eager and combative, but neat play and movement from the Maroons monopolised possession and territory; fortunately for the Blues, a combination of an unpredictable, howling wind, sodden pitch, and desire for that extra pass too many confounded them. In 24 minutes a Robert Mackenzie break, off Peter Mackenzie, led to a corner on the right, and the same player's corner glanced off competing heads in the centre and carried on to be controlled by Murray on the opposite bye-line, 18 metres from goal. His chipped return reached Macmillan in the centre but his snap effort went straight upwards.

On the half-hour a flighted Macmillan forward pass from midway within the Carloway

half caused havoc in the Blues' box before breaking rightwards to Jones. His instant response was charged down and spun towards the bye-line on Craigie's left, where Murray reacted first to thwack it goalwards, but Craigie somehow dropped on the ball and managed to hold it. In 33 minutes Jones again broke behind the line, this time on the left touch-line, and 18 metres from goal squared to Murray, but his right-footer was a metre too high.

The final close thing for Na Gormaich arrived in 38 minutes when "Nipper" advanced into the Carloway half on the left and supplied O'Donnell, running off "Tiger" to the side of the box. His sharp, low cross, 10 metres from the bye-line, was met perfectly by Murray but the slightest deflection off Smith took it just outside Craigie's left-hand post.

Half-time: Lochs 0 Carloway 0

"*Man the barricades*" had been the order of the day so far for Carloway, against a superlative midfield of Murray/Macmillan/Mackenzie/Campbell, and a fiendishly elusive hit-man in Jones, but like Revie's Leeds Utd. away in Europe, they had single-mindedly kept their shape, assisted by conditions which even an Ardiles or a Pirlo would have found challenging. The pattern did not change in the second half.

In 48 minutes neat interplay from Murray, in the centre circle, to Mackenzie moving forward saw him find Macmillan on the edge of the Carloway box, but his low effort was diverted past Craigie's left-hand post by Smith's ankle. Three minutes later "Nomie" won the ball off "Dokus" and found Peter Mackenzie free on the right, moving into the Blues' half. His deep cross reached O'Donnell running free by the far post but his header zoomed a couple of metres over. A minute later Macmillan, deep within the Carloway box off a Murray breaker, saw another low attempt blocked once more by "Tiger", a metre past Craigie's left-hand post. In 56 minutes Craigie had to charge out to punch clear from Macmillan and Jones on his 6-metre line as a classic "Nomie" free-kick, 10 metres in from the left touch-line and 20 metres from goal, winged across the face of goal.

Na Gormaich, with some assistance from an inexorable wind, became more apparent in midfield as Maciver, Anderson, and "Tago" dug in and competed but "Barra" and "Dokus" still had to retreat deep for service and to help, while pressure on the left kept "Laxay's" sorties to a minimum. Macleod remained unthreatened.

On the hour Peter Mackenzie played straight forward down the right touch-line for Macmillan to break behind "Laxay" and wide of Smith, then send in a vicious, skidding diagonal across goal, 18 metres from the bye-line. Jones whizzed in from the left to the far post but the speeding ball was too difficult to control and his effort spun well past from 10 metres. In 64 minutes Murray, midway within the Blues' half, found "Nomie" on his right on a rare foray forward, and his neat chipped diagonal to the left of the box broke through to Macmillan coming in from the left. In a penalty area as busy as Sauchiehall Street on a Saturday night, he managed to drive low towards goal from 12 metres, but Craigie had anticipated the danger and spread brilliantly to block with his foot.

In 71 minutes Rab Maciver was supplied by Mackay, advancing through the middle,

and he managed to find “Dokus” coming in from the right, but his crisp daisy-cutter went straight to Macleod.

As the players started looking at the clock, even “Nipper” tried his luck in 75 minutes, set up by Murray on the left to come forward and send a nasty, skidding drive in from 24 metres, but Craigie was untroubled, low to his left. In 81 minutes O’Donnell, now at right-back, was set up by “Nomie” to send in a high, flighted cross to the far post from midway within the Carloway half on the right touch-line. Maclean won a tussle with “Tiger” to crack in the loose ball, low from 16 metres, but Craigie again blocked low, this time to his right and into the side netting.

As the dreaded extra-time loomed, dogged persistence and a Man. U.-type self-belief that if you keep at it, a goal is simply bound to come, Lochs finally registered the goal that their play had suggested throughout. Once more Murray set up Jones running diagonally to steam off down the touch-line on the Carloway left. Twenty metres from the bye-line, he crossed into a crowded penalty area, where Macmillan managed to chest the ball outwards and down towards the arriving Robert Mackenzie. Under pressure 12 metres out, he drove the ball forward, low to Craigie’s left, and despite a couple of nicks, its power carried it home (1-0).

With seven minutes left, awkward choices appeared for both sides: for Lochs, continue as they were or defend and hold, against a side that itself had defended well but had hardly threatened? For Carloway, why not throw caution to the wind, and go for it? 0-2 or 0-3 was no worse than 0-1. Na Gormaich did become a little more adventurous, Lochs slightly less, but the harsh conditions precluded any realistic, further chances, “Nipper” blocking a hopeful “Barra” effort, 14 metres out by Macleod’s left-hand post, off a searching Anderson cross from the left, in 87 minutes.

Full-time: Lochs 1 (0) Carloway 0 (0)

So far as it went, na Gormaich performed creditably; the unfortunate corollary to that is “it” only went as far as the midfield. The absence of a dedicated out-and-out striker and incessant pressure from the home side as a result of dominance in ball possession and territory, coupled with aggressive forward movement, compelled Maciver, Anderson, “Tago”, and “Laxay” to spend most of their time holding, rather than creating. Consequently, “Cirbhig” was marginalized on the right and “Barra” and “Dokus” were forced to act mainly as midfield support, rather than in the opposing half. At times, it was near-impossible to gain possession as the Lochs’ old guard, with a few substitutions, for instance, Angie Campbell, Robert Jones, and Jim O’Donnell, for David Martin, Ally Mackenzie, etc., defied the years, like a collective expression of Dorian Grays, and re-activated their golden years’ form of the 2000s. Thankfully for the Blues, Gordon Craigie, Domhnall Mackay, “Tiger”, and Billy Anderson were up for the challenge and were undeviating in the cause throughout, with “Christy” having his finest performance so far on his return as a no-nonsense back-up to his captain.

Lochs Man of the Match: David Macmillan.

Carloway Man of the Match: Chris “Christy” Smith.