

Coop Cup Round 2:

## **Carloway 6 (1) South End 3 (0)**

*Ali "Laxay" Macdonald 38*

*Billy Anderson 55 (pen.)*

*Lee Johnson 60, 64, 88*

*Ross Maciver 61*

*Andrew "Reebs" MacIsaac 49*

*Daniel Steele 68 (pen.)*

*Kevin Morrison 83*

*At Cnoc a' Choilich.*

*13:45, Saturday, 30.5.14.*

*Ref.: D.J.Maclean (Bragar)*

*Far-side line judge: Innes Macleod (Carloway).*

*Near-side line judge: Dylan Foster (first half); Paul Foster (second half) (both Carloway).*

### **CARLOWAY:**

*Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.*

*Gordon Craigie*

*Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Chris "Christy" Smith Joe Armstrong*

*Stuart "Gochan" Macleod Eachainn Miller Billy Anderson ■ Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod (capt.) Ali "Laxay" Macdonald*

*Lee Johnson Ross Maciver*

*Subs.used: Josh Harris (Billy Anderson) 73; Ben Smith (Lee Johnson) 90; Graham Macdonald (Ali "Laxay" Macdonald) 90; Andrew Macleod (Ross Maciver) 90+1; Euan "a'Ghuilc" Macleod (Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod) 90+2.*

*Yellow card: Billy Anderson 73.*

In the last decade, the orbits of these two sides have collided regularly, with mixed results. In late April, 2006, on a gloriously hot day down at Cnoc a' Choilich (yes, we used to get these in Lewis), two early goals from Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod and Neil Bowman in the first ten minutes sent Carloway unexpectedly into HAC Round 2, despite the then reigning Uist and Barra Champions clawing one back through a penalty late in the first half and edging the second half.

Two years later witnessed two much more explosive encounters, with honours even. In early May, 2008, in a repeat of the previous HAC Round 1 encounter in Carloway, the score sheet remained blank until the 63rd minute before Chris Macleod converted a sublime "Dokus" feed. Then, in a stunning final 6 minutes, the Blues registered four more against the tiring Uibhistich. A week later the sides met again, this time in the Coop Cup in Daliburgh, and if na Gormaich began this game in complacent mood after their earlier victory, it was soon replaced by desperation as they tried to avoid a thrashing. In many respects this was an amazing game: the Blues were 2-0 up after four minutes (Sqweg scoring from 60 metres in 30 seconds with the second kick of the game!!!), the tie was level at 3-3 each on 21, and South End led 5-3 by half-time. Another three goals in the second half made the final result 7-4 but the most memorable feature of this confrontation was a master-class in

finishing from 5-goal Roddy Campbell, over from Skye for the match.

A year later saw a return to the south for the Blues, again in the HAC Round 1, but a late goal from Josie Campbell meant the squad returned home disconsolate after a reasonable second-half display had not carried them over the line. Lately, however, the emergence of Lochdar Saints has eclipsed South End somewhat in the Southern Isles but on May 2nd they still managed to dismiss Ness 3-1 in Round 1 of the Coop, and competed hard last Saturday against Athletic at Goathill in the HAC, despite eventually losing 2-4.

So, no doubt a fight on the cards for a struggling Carloway, especially for the unusual Blues' line-up that appeared this afternoon: a young side, missing stalwarts, Domhnall Mackay and Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald (at a wedding in Inverness); Rab Maciver and Jack Buchanan (injured); and the unavailable Kyle Brunton, Kevin "Barra" Macneill, Norman "Taz" Morrison, and Calum Tom Moody. Thankfully, Billy Anderson and Murdo "Swegg" Macleod shouldered the burden in central midfield, on either side of new star, Eachain Miller, and supported by Stuart "Gochan" Macleod and Ali "Laxay" Macdonald on the flanks. Fortunately, a fit-again Lee Johnson could partner the promising Ross Maciver in attack, while versatile veteran, Chris "Christy" Smith, adopted the central stopper role, beside the ever-dependable Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur; youth star, Joe Armstrong on his left, and the Great Wall (i.e. the redoubtable Gordon Craigie) behind him.

A mild, sunny afternoon, with only the slightest of sou'westerlies funnelling up the valley, rewarded a sparse crowd, no doubt gratified to see their heroes take the fight to the Deasachs, straight from the whistle. Premiership pace - and width - appeared to have replaced La Liga patterns, as after winning balls in midfield or defence, Anderson, "Sweg", and Miller repeatedly tried to liberate Johnson on the right and Maciver between the stoppers, usually towards the left.

After 4 minutes "Laxay" managed to win the ball on the left centre-line and go off on a stumbling, twisting run to the edge of the box, but his cross rebounded back to him unexpectedly, 12 metres from goal, and he could only stab it hurriedly at the keeper. The back-line were defending high, but the Hidegkuti-style of Andrew "Reebs" Maclsaac, though lacking pace, kept drawing them further forward, and Armstrong started to get pressured on the Blues' left by Daniel Steele.

In 6 minutes, two Steele corners caused problems in front of Craigie, the second flying untouched across the face of the goal, 10 metres out. A dangerous Steele free-kick, midway within the Carloway half on the right led to an undignified scramble around the Blues' penalty spot, "Tiger", then "Christy", blocking Maclsaac and Morrison in turn, before "Sqweg" booted the ball on to the Pentland Road. Two minutes later yet another corner, this time on Craigie's right, ricocheted straight out low to No.16, 20 metres out in front of goal, but just as he moved to strike it, the ball bobbed and his attempt soared high over. A minute later an Anderson free-kick, on the left, midway within South End's half, reached the far post, where Miller headed it

invitingly across goal, but the keeper reacted well to snatch it, 10 metres out.

On 24 minutes Anderson tried his luck from 24 metres in the centre, but this free-kick cleared the left side of the bar by 3-4 metres. A minute later na Gormaich assembled the best move of the game so far: "Laxay", deep in his own half in the left corner, managing to win the ball in a tussle with Steele, and immediately transferring it forward to Miller in the centre circle, who instantly turned and sent a perfect diagonal inside the left-back for Johnson to steam on to. He made the edge of the box, checked back a pace, then sent a low daisy-cutter to the approaching keeper's right, but a metre beyond the far post.

The goalie had to be alert again in the 34th minute, to first clear a nasty Johnson corner from under his bar. "Laxay" met it, 10 metres out, but his reflex header went a metre wide of the Uibhistichs' right-hand post.

A minute later a real opportunity arrived unexpectedly for the Blues, when an Anderson corner on the South End left cleared everyone in the centre for Johnson to gather on the far-side edge of the box, on the bye-line. Johnson checked back past a man, then sent a rising square cross back in, which appeared to strike a hand. As is often the case, it did not appear intentional, but if it denies an opponent an advantage, well ..... ? "Sqweg" hit it low and hard but a foot past the Deasachs' right-hand post.

Three minutes later it was forgotten, as *animateur-in-chief*, Anderson, sent the perfect de Boer over the left defence for Johnson to charge forward once more. His cross in got lost in a fankle of legs around the penalty spot; "Laxay" won it, tricked his way forward through two challenges, then slotted the ball low to the helpless keeper's right from 12 metres (**1-0**).

Any Blues' complacency was swiftly dispelled in the 41st minute, when the irrepressible Steele wriggled free down the right, then sent in a head-high cross, 16 metres from the bye-line. However, No. 8, arriving in front of goal, had to twist his neck back to meet it, and sent his header whizzing a metre outside Carloway's left-hand post.

### **Half-time: Carloway 1 South End 0**

Na Gormaich had pressed hard in the first part of the first half, but lacked precision in the last third, though the midfield supplied and Maciver and Johnson ran and ran. South End were by no means absent and had been periodically dangerous, especially on the right. Marking had been zonal, with "Tiger"/Miller/Armstrong spreading and holding, allowing Macisaac to retreat, spread, and break, leaving pace to the livewire Steele on the right, and allow Allan Paul Steele to emerge on the left, lie deep, and attempt the cutting ball between "Tiger" and "Christy" for a breaking Maclsaac. Fortunately, for the Blues, skill and holding were Maclsaac's forte, not pace.

Another goal was necessary. It came fast! Unfortunately for the Blues, it came at the wrong end! In 49 minutes, an almighty kick-out by the keeper travelled the length of the field, bounced once, high towards the right of the Carloway goal, where it was pursued by MacIsaac, and just outside the right of Carloway's box, he managed to hook it perfectly, hard across Craigie, and just inside the Blues' far post **(1-1)**.

One moment of brilliance, and, suddenly, all to play for. Fortunately, for the locals, na Gormaich responded to the challenge. The tiring stalwarts were superseded by youth, and Miller started to run the midfield, Maciver became "difficult", and in an amazing 13-minute spell, a game that had always looked goal-shy, experienced 5 more strikes.

In 55 minutes, "Laxay" once more presented a problem for the Deasachs down the left, broke inwards 20 metres from the bye-line, then delivered a measured pass diagonally forward for the racing Miller, who sped into the box, angled past No.3 to his right, then was body-checked strongly to the ground for a second penalty award. There was no debate over the merits of this one. Anderson assumed the responsibility and drove the ball low and hard just inside the Deasachs' left-hand post **(2-1)**.

Three minutes later a long ball forward by Armstrong saw the keeper rush out to boot clear outside his box on his right, but the ball only carried forward to "Laxay", who rode a tackle inwards. However, his low attempt from 20 metres was scrambled past for a corner by the retreating keeper at his right-hand post. The resulting Anderson corner was knocked out all the way to "Christy" in the centre circle, and he immediately switched it right to "Gochan", coming forward. He then turned it in to Miller, who freed Johnson, ghosting behind the line and into the right of the box to dribble inwards past the keeper, then touch the ball home from 5 metres **(3-1)**.

A minute later it was four as Armstrong broke up a Deasach surge midway within his own half on the left, then transmitted it forward to "Laxay" on the touchline on the left centre line. He then flicked the ball on instantly for Maciver to storm forward into the centre, holding off a cloud of defenders, then stroke the ball home from 16 metres to the keeper's right **(4-1)**.

South End were now wobbling dangerously as Carloway surged confidently. In 64 minutes a dominant Miller fought his way through the centre then provided a sublime diagonal just inside the left-back for Johnson to sprint clear into the right of the box. The keeper was out like a flash to boot clear but, unluckily for him, the ball rebounded off Johnson, then behind him, and allowed Johnson to carry on, check inside a covering defender on the line, and slide home **(5-1)**.

The Blues had hardly time to celebrate before a Deasach push down the right saw a No.17 flick forward just inside the right of the box break off "Tiger's" hand. Steele gave Craigie no chance low and hard into his right-hand corner **(5-2)**.

The game was already winding down, with the Uibhistich forcing the pace to claw back the deficit; Carloway happy enough to sit back, then surge in numbers whenever the opportunity arose. In 78 minutes “Laxay” once more broke through the middle to 20 metres from goal, before sliding the forward diagonal to Johnson to make the bye-line, but his savage cross/shot was beaten away by the keeper at the near post.

In 83 minutes another shock arrived for na Gormaich when a Steele free-kick from the left centre-line travelled high, straight through the middle, and allowed an unchallenged Morrison to run in from the right and nod neatly past Craigie’s left from 12 metres (**5-3**).

Carloway replied three minutes later when Miller again came driving through the centre, then sent yet another golden diagonal low through the left defence line for Johnson to career inwards, then power a right-footer home to the keeper’s right from 16 metres (**6-3**).

**Full-time: Carloway 6 (1) South End 3 (0)**

At half-time, it was difficult to imagine that this tie had another eight goals in it. Both teams had come forward at every opportunity but clear-cut chances and shots on target had been mighty few. 1-0 was probably appropriate at that point, but even that goal had been a result of individual inspiration rather than concerted play. Strangely enough, the Carloway outfit had operated efficiently as a unit, despite the wholesale absence of regular performers, as had South End, who reputedly had had difficulty assembling a squad for the trip north.

Amazingly, na Gormaich, often categorized as a Dads’ Army team, finished the game with nine players under the age of twenty on the field, which augurs well for the future, even if the present can be viewed as a bit of a trial. The buzzword in Cnoc a’ Choilich at the moment is “*rebuilding*”. Keep saying this and you will feel much better.

The makeshift Blues’ side gelled well - eventually. Passing an Amazonian tribe’s initiation rites for adulthood is probable child’s play compared to establishing yourself in amateur football in the Western Isles. At times it can be more blood-thirsty than an Aztec sacrificial ritual, and anyone who doesn’t man up super-fast can end up in bits in the ditch.

Fortunately, the signs are that Ross Maciver, “Gochan”, and Joe Armstrong are improving match by match, as, hopefully, Graham Macdonald, Mark Macleod, Andrew Macleod, and Euan “a’Ghuilc” Macleod will as they receive more game-play. Eachain Miller, in addition, hit the ground running, competing as if this was just another day at the office, displaying an oversight for game-play previously confined to Billy Anderson, “Dokus”, and “Sqweg”. Patience and nurturing are required, but the omens are good.

**Carloway Man of the Match: Eachainn Miller.**

**South End Man of the Match: Andrew "Reebs" MacIsaac.**