

Eilean an Fhraoich Cup Round 1 Leg 2:

## **Back 2 (2) Carloway 0 (0)** (Aggregate: **Back 2 Carloway 0**)

*John Macleod 8*

*Chris Macleod 21*

*At Col Uarach.*

*Monday, 15.06.15.*

*Referee: David "Spider" Macleod.*

*Back Line Judge: Donald "Dano" Macdonald.*

*Carloway line judge: Willie "Dola" Morrison.*

**CARLOWAY.**

*Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.*

*Jack Maclennan (United)*

*Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Phil Macleod Calum "Dola" Morrison (Ness)*

*Kevin "Barra" Macneil Eachainn Miller Billy Anderson Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod (capt.) Ali "Laxay" Macdonald*

*Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Ross Maciver*

*Subs. used: Dan Crossley (Ali "Laxay" Macdonald) 61; Gordon "Tago" Macdonald (Calum "Dola" Morrison) 77.*

*Subs. not used: Gordon Craigie; Chris "Christy" Smith; Andrew Macleod.*

**BACK.**

*Manager: Kenneth "Bugsy" Smith.*

*Scott Duncan John Macleod*

*Murray Macleod Nick "Nuck" Davis (Athletic) Chris Macleod (capt.) Stephen Kettings (Point)*

*Scott "Flapjack" Macaulay (Athletic) Campbell Macdonald (West Side) Jason Macleod Andrew "Mowgli" Macleod (Point)*

*James Macleod (Lochs)*

*Subs. used: Stuart Macdonald (Stephen Kettings) 75; Dennis Macdonald (Murray Macleod) 87.*

The first warm day of summer had declined into light cloud cover by evening, though there was little apparent advantage for either side weather-wise, as the fans waited expectantly for action slightly more exciting than the two sides' two previous drawn meetings this season: 1-1 in the League here in April, and a stultifying 0-0 last Monday at Cnoc a' Choilich. Not that the players could be faulted for commitment, or effort, in the First Leg but Billy Anderson's 12th minute effort was the one dangerous moment of the whole

90 minutes, with few balls in the face to worry quality goalkeepers like James Macleod and Jack MacLennan.

Wednesday's 1-3 reverse at Goathill had further evidenced the most obvious of Carloway's concerns: a lack of goals; indeed, a lack of chance-creation, to turn into goals, although another continuing leitmotif of the current campaign manifested itself tonight: a squad ravaged by injury to key players. Defensive colossus, Domhnall Mackay, was now ruled out, due to the leg-strain incurred late on versus Athletic, while Donald "D.I." MacLennan and Jack Buchanan remained unfit. Norman "Taz" Morrison (Harris), Stuart "Gochan" Macleod, and the Niseachs, Lee Johnson and Josh Harris, were, of course, ineligible.

Fortunately, there were a few rays of sunshine: Eachain Miller and Ross Maciver, unavailable for Goathill, featured in midfield and attack, while Phil (Tolstachaolais) Macleod returned from his arm/shoulder injury to slot into Mackay's place comfortably at centre-back, with Calum "Dola" Morrison (Ness) making a welcome first appearance to his left. Surprisingly, Dan Crossley, whose knee injury towards half-time in Inverness was to cost the Blues dearly in the 2014 HAC Final, graced the bench, alongside long-time fans' favourite, Gordon "Tago" Macdonald. Almost like old times. No sign of Iain Angus "Gus" Maciver, Fraser "Frazmac" Macleod, or Scott Macaulay, though!!! Andrew Macleod was there too, but no sign of Mark Macleod, Euan "a' Ghuilc" Macleod, or Joe Armstrong.

The Back squad had been strengthened from the previous week with veteran defensive rock, Jason Macleod, slotting in beside West Side's Campbell Macdonald at centre back; Andrew "Mowgli" Macleod, now of Point, scorer of the only goal which won the Jock Stein for his club last Friday and subsequent Man of the Match, started tonight at right back, allowing his teammate, Stephen Kettings, to move forward to right half/wing in place of Chris Mackay of Lochs; and Stuart Macdonald dropped to the bench to allow non-stop pain-in-the-posterior, Murray Macleod, to start tonight as left-sided *terquartista*.

Interestingly enough, with "Dola's" inclusion, it meant all eight clubs on the island were represented at Col Uarach.

Carloway had appeared determined to gain an early initiative last week, to establish an advantage, which would carry them towards the return tie in a favourable position. Unfortunately, this goal was not achieved and the early signs tonight were that Back were intent on the same approach. With Duncan lying wide to keep "Barra" outward, and the marking of Macdonald unresolved, "Mowgli" and Kettings pushed hard on the right through "Laxay", drawing "Dola" diagonally out to cover. In the apparent absence of a dedicated holding midfielder, Murray Macleod was free to roam, and "Sqweg" had to drop repeatedly to cover, leaving Anderson often as sole creative influence. The prevailing uncertainty of who was to pick up Macleod or Macdonald enabled the Bacachs to cause several shaky moments for the Blues early on.

The opener came quickly: an early joust between “Mowgli” and “Laxay” midway within the Carloway left permitted the full-back to play on to Kettings who moved towards the right of the box. He took on “Dola” to his right and as Macleod moved to cover, sent a high inviting cross into the centre, where Macdonald stole in in front of “Barra” and behind “Tiger” to neatly head-glance the gift just inside Macleod’s right-hand post (1-0).

Moments later, a second almost arrived, when Chris Macleod won the ball in the centre just inside his own half, then stormed forward, before slipping the ball square to his right to “Mowgli”, 22 metres from goal. Davis came sprinting through the centre and into the right of the Carloway box and received an excellent early slip forward from Macleod with a first-time right-foot hook from 16 metres to Macleod’s right, but the ball spun a metre wide of the far post.

As Carloway struggled to achieve stability, Bacach chances came fast: in 11 minutes, a Duncan free-kick, midway within the Blues’ half, on the Back right touch-line, came high across goal to be met by “Flapjack”, 10 metres out beyond the far post, and Miller had to move fast to head his reverse-header past for a corner. Five minutes later a Duncan corner on Carloway’s right was met by Chris Macleod in the centre but Miller blocked his inward header, 8 metres out. “Mowgli” chopped it inwards but Maciver, on the goal-line, just inside the Blues’ left-hand post, managed to sky the ball downfield.

However, Back’s pressure finally paid off in 21 minutes when typically tricky play by Murray Macleod, midway within the Carloway half on the Back right, saw him move inwards across the line to supply Chris Macleod, who in turn moved leftwards before releasing an unstoppable left-foot scorcher high into Macleod’s top left corner from 24 metres (2-0).

As Back subconsciously relaxed, Carloway finally managed to establish a belated foothold in midfield, but it was the half-hour before they threatened, when a delicately flighted “Sqweg” free-kick, 20 metres out to the left of the Bacach box, forced Macleod to hold to his left. However, three minutes later Kettings turned past “Laxay” into the centre, played a quick 1-2 with Macdonald, and then sent Murray Macleod scampering through left of centre towards the Blues’ box but the ball was marginally out of reach and he could only toe-end it from the edge of the box straight to Macleod before “Dola” closed him down.

In 36 minutes na Gormaich replied with, arguably, their best move of the game when “Sqweg”, on the left of the centre line, sent a glorious cross-field Frank de Boer to the toes of “Barra”, midway within the Back half, on the right touch-line. As Murray rushed across to tackle, “Barra” retreated, then returned the ball low to “Sqweg” rushing towards him, and the midfielder instantly chipped the neatest of lobs over Murray for “Barra” to turn and race down the touch-line. Twelve metres from goal, he sent in a high cross which the covering Murray Macleod managed to head away by the near post for a corner. Two minutes later an Anderson free-kick, just inside the Back half on their right, was swung in to the centre of the box where “Dokus” edged the jump to head on and down to Macleod’s right, but a deflection took the power

from it, and the young keeper had no trouble gathering.

### **Half-time: Back 2 Carloway 0**

It had been a torrid opening thirty minutes for na Gormaich, with an energetic Back Select pressuring them relentlessly, exploiting pace and imagination to create multiple chances to finish the tie: Kettings and “Mowgli” pushing hard on the right; Murray racing wide on the left; Chris Macleod controlling from the centre; and Murray Macleod cropping up everywhere. Once Carloway had the defensive marking settled, however, “Sgweg”, Miller, and Anderson had seemed more at ease, hence more solid and combative. Nevertheless, imaginative forward diagonals were rare, to open Back wide, as “Barra” and “Laxay” lay so deep, as did “Dokus” in the centre, so once again Maciver was cast as Napoleon on Elba.

However, two early incidents almost destroyed their recovery: in 48 minutes a long Macdonald ball forward was headed clear to his left by Phil Macleod, just outside his own box. “Dola” managed to win a tussle with Davis to move backwards and send the ball back to MacIennan, but the pass-back was woefully underhit and Davis, following up, just managed to touch a low right-footer past MacIennan’s right-hand from 12 metres, only for the ball to run across goal and well-wide of the far post. A minute later, a long forward clearance by Murray, midway within his own half, on the left, was mis-headed by Macleod, midway within the Carloway half, and dropped neatly for Murray Macleod, square to his left. The Bacach raced forward and, as MacIennan advanced, he cracked a low left-footer to the right of the keeper, but MacIennan managed to block brilliantly with his right foot.

Desperation for a life-line saw Carloway begin to adjust the permutations repeatedly, firstly with “Dokus” and Anderson switching roles. In 58 minutes it almost paid off, when a first-class “Dokus” splitter over “Mowgli’s” head found Maciver free in the left of the Back box. From the bye-line, he slipped the ball back to the approaching “Laxay” and his immediate right-foot crack at goal was met, 14 metres out, by Anderson, moving in behind Macdonald, but his instinctive header from 12 metres whizzed like lightning a metre over the bar.

Crossley now entered the fray up front, replacing “Laxay”, whose position was taken by Maciver, but in 63 minutes it could have been three. A Murray corner on the Carloway left came over high for Chris Macleod to head in strongly from the penalty spot. John Macleod tried to hook it onwards, but was crowded leftwards by Anderson and “Tiger”. Kettings then met it with an instant left-footer, but, though it beat MacIennan low to his left, it whacked the outside of the post and went past. Five minutes later Back once more broke down the left, Murray Macleod fed by Murray to make the bye-line, but his sharp low cross was just out of reach for Duncan, arriving 12 metres out by the far post.

Carloway immediately replied, when a “Dokus” corner on Macleod’s left curled over high and the young keeper was unable to grasp the passing ball.

Macaulay had to look sharp to knock the ball away from Maciver by the far post; Miller headed back in and once more, Macaulay cleared the danger, heading away hurriedly for a corner. In 76 minutes another "Dokus" corner, this time from the Back right, was headed out by "Mowgli" by the near post, then hooked back in by "Barra" from 12 metres, but his left-footer cleared the bar by several metres. In 80 minutes Crossley won the ball midway within the Back half, then released "Dokus" down the Carloway left. His high winging cross landed perfectly in the centre for Anderson, 14 metres out between Jason Macleod and Macaulay, but his headed effort went straight to Macleod.

Back had a chance to counter when an enormous clearance downfield bounced high over Macleod's head for Macleod to run in unchallenged on Macleod, but as the keeper advanced, he miscued his attempted lob from 20 metres, and the goalie was able to rush back to collect a ball that was going past anyway.

Two final opportunities arrived for the Blues to make the score-line more respectable: in 85 minutes "Dokus" played the ball forward to Anderson, within the Back half, and he headed on leftwards to the unmarked "Tago", who made ground before sending in a ball to "Sqweg", arriving at the near side of the box. He immediately flicked the ball onwards for Crossley to meet in the centre, 12 metres out, but his header was held safely by Macleod to his left. A minute later, Crossley burst down the left touch-line and his trademark run took him steaming into the left of the Bacach box, but Macleod made himself big by the near post to block his low drive from 10 metres away for a corner.

**Full-time: Back 2 (2) Carloway 0 (0) (Aggregate: Back 2 Carloway 0)**

Tonight Back managed to achieve what Carloway had tried to achieve last Monday, and which most teams try hard to do: i.e. "*Strike while the iron is hot*", as it were; in other words, score as often as possible when you are in control, as it does not always last - and Back certainly were in control in the first half-hour. After that, the game was an even contest for close to an hour, although as the second half progressed, the balance of chances favoured the Blues slightly. Many reasons could be advanced for that: on the evidence of the first hour, Carloway's lack of shape and cohesion suggested that they were unlikely ever to score, therefore the Bacachs may have sunk into the dangerous subconscious conviction that so long as they stayed alert, the job was a long way to having been done, even later when na Gormaich did establish some form of equilibrium and movement.

The permutations exercised by the Blues in the second half, including the arrival of the talismanic Dan Crossley, clearly had an effect on the attitude and spirit of the Carloway squad. As the half moved on, it was apparent that a form of regeneration had occurred; they increasingly seemed to believe that recovery was possible. Identifying the reasons for this is the management's task - good luck! - but what had been a blunt instrument certainly began to look like scoring a few as the game advanced. Many reasons for this can be advanced: less aggression by the hosts; Anderson and "Dokus" switching

roles; a greater willingness by “Dokus” to run at the opposition, especially down the left; “Barra” likewise on the right; the arrival of Crossley; the creation of more space for “Sqweg” to unlock the defence. No doubt all of these aspects generated a greater confidence in the squad for the task, so that, despite defeat and elimination, there is a degree of hope.

**Back Man of the Match: Andrew “Mowgli” Macleod.**

**Carlaway Man of the Match: Murdo “Sqweg” Macleod.**