

## Jock Stein Cup Round 1:

# **Carloway 4 (3) Back 3 (1)**

*Jake Allan 20, 24, 89*

*Chris Stone 45+1*

*Archie "Statto" Macdonald 29*

*Gordon "Gordie" Maciver 52*

*Jason Macleod 87*

*At Cnoc a'Choilich, Carloway, 19.00.*

*Friday, 29.4.16.*

*Ref.: Neil Macritchie.*

*Carloway line judge: Alasdair "Tiger" Macarthur*

*Back line judge: Alasdair "Red" Mackenzie*

**CARLOWAY:** 4-4-2.

*Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.*

*Asst. Managers: Kenny "Noley" MacIennan; "Gus" Maciver.*

*Gordon Craigie*

*Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Donald "D.I." MacIennan Ali  
"Laxay" Macdonald*

*Kevin "Barra" Macneil Dan Crossley Eachainn Miller Archie "Statto" MacDonald  
Jake Allan Ross Maciver*

*Subs. used: Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod (Eachainn Miller) 40; Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald (Ross Maciver) 67; Chris "Christy" Smith (Donald "D.I." MacIennan) 80.*

*Subs. not used: Ross "Tiny" Maclean; Josh Harris.*

*Yellow card: Donald "D.I." MacIennan 23*

After the champagne-sprayed euphoria of belated Cup success on Friday evening, it was back to the rather mundane task of taking the first step towards repeating the feat in another cup. Last year the Blues fell at this first hurdle in the Jock Stein, 0-1, at Creagan Dubh, thanks to a late strike from Robert Mackenzie, which, admittedly, the Maroons' pressure throughout had largely justified. 2015 was, of course, a troubled season for na Gormaich, despite initial promise inspired by an ABC Cup Final appearance. A season of fits and starts ended with them only narrowly avoiding second-bottom spot in the League, due to their defeating Athletic at Cnoc a' Choilich in their final League game.

The 2011 Champions's season was even more embarrassing, being handed the wooden spoon, but in their four meetings with the Blues, they still emerged ahead of their opponents. Goal-scoring, or lack of it, proved to be Carloway's Achilles' heel last season, registering only 16 strikes in an unhappy League campaign. Against the Bacachs only one goal was recorded and even that came in the 92nd minute at Col Uarach via the head of centre-back colossus, Domhnall Mackay, off a superb "Dokus" free-kick, which delivered what at times had seemed unlikely, a 1-1 League draw. In the EaF they did manage a 0-0 borefest at home, but then collapsed to a dispiriting 0-2 away defeat. The clubs' final meeting, in the League at Cnoc a' Choilich, prolonged na Gormaich's suffering even more with a 0-3 nightmare, only one of two League victories Back achieved that season.

Tonight, the Carloway squad was unchanged, but the formation and starting line-up were altered, subtly. In the ABC the pace of Dan Crossley had been

deployed up front, ahead of "Dokus", in a bid to exploit the aging legs of Johnnie Wallace, Donnie "Noe" Smith, and Duncan Maclean, but this had permitted a weakened midfield to be unreasonably pressured by the Morrisons and Scott Graham, especially in a highly uncomfortable opening 15-20 minutes. With "Barvas" and Martainn Shields lying wide, "Barra" and "Statto", always mindful to protect "Tiger" and "Laxay", could not penetrate forward enough to flank "Dokus", and help him augment the runs of "Raymondo"; not at first, anyway.

Tonight, further fine-tuning brought a return to 4-4-2, with Crossley retreating to central midfield, "Dokus" hitting the bench, and Jake Allan pushing forward on the right to support young star, Ross Maciver, whenever possible. Back are clearly taking the Kenny Dalglish approach to re-building: from the back forward; fair enough, although, in an island environment, that may be a consequence of what is available, not principle. There was no Andrew V.P., or Chris Macleod, nor as rumoured, the re-appearance of "Moley", but perennial stalwarts like Jason Macleod, Michael Maciver, and ex-Blue, Ali "Tolsta" Maciver, formed the defence, joined by ex-Westside hero, Campbell Macdonald; new recruit, Chris Stone, figured in midfield, and emerging pacesetter, Gordon "Gordie" Maciver, led up front.

Once again, what is rapidly becoming a permanent feature of games on the island greeted the diehards: a howling westerly which returned any high ball the Bacachs employed forward back into their faces, with several violent hailstone squalls added in as a bonus. The adrenalin overload from Friday's ABC still seemed to be fuelling the Blues, to some degree, as, assisted by the gale, they immediately seized midfield control, pressing forward and wide at pace. An early passing move saw "Laxay" find Miller, who played right to Allan, and he in turn sent Maciver through in the middle, but Michael Maciver raced out to block the ball away.

Then, in 9 minutes a "Barra" long ball from midway within his own half on the right found Maciver breaking right, behind his marker and wide off Macleod. He carried the ball into the box, but his namesake read his intelligent slip to his right from 12 metres with an outstretched foot to block. Crossley was on to the rebound but was, in turn, blocked away for a corner. Three minutes later "Tiger" won the ball on the right touchline, midway within the Back half, and raced forward, but his low, hard cross was also knocked away for the Blues' umpteenth corner.

A Macleod push on Maciver, just inside the touchline, on the Bacach right, midway within their half, led to a high, right-foot free-kick from Crossley, which cleared the central pack, and was bundled home by Allan by the far post (1-0).

Eventually, in 23 minutes, Back managed to get forward, gaining a free-kick in the centre, 20 metres from goal, but Louie Macdonald's firmly struck ball cannoned off the wall and away. Moments later, Carloway's lead was doubled when Crossley robbed "Tolsta" just inside the Back half, on Carloway's left touch-line. He took off like Usain Bolt, powered past Macdonald on the left,

then sent a vicious low square ball across, 10 metres from the line. Again Allan came charging in by the far post, this time stabbing the gift high into the net with his left foot (2-0).

Back immediately rallied and gained another free-kick 20 metres from goal, slightly to their left, but again the ball came back off the wall, breaking to Dennis Macdonald, 20 metres out in the centre. His instant strike, however, was last seen passing Cirbhig. Three minutes another half-chance arrived for the Bacachs when a corner gained on their left saw Campbell Macdonald whip across a low, inviting ball, 12 metres out, but, amazingly, the ball flew through the assembled multitude in the centre, without a touch.

A minute later Back's night suddenly became so, so much worse, when Miller received a "Tiger" throw-in on the Carloway right, right on the bye-line, and turned inwards. He managed to trick his way through a challenge on the bye-line before firing the ball across. This time it was "Statto" who rushed in from the left to blast the ball high into the net from 6 metres (3-0).

The warning lights were flashing now for Back, as, first, Miller sent in a low shot from 25 metres which Maciver smothered low to his left in 34 minutes, then an effort from Allan, breaking into the box, had to be scrambled away on the right for yet another corner.

However a nasty injury to Miller, and his forced departure, off-balanced the Blues, and as they struggled to regain their shape and cohesive momentum, a surge on their left by Back gave Stone the chance to break forward, then turn inside into the centre. From 30 metres he thwacked a rising drive to the left of Craigie's goal. Van Der Sar got his left arm to it, and appeared to have blocked the ball upwards and over the bar, but it came down this side of the bar and bounced home (3-1).

### Half-time: Carloway 3 Back 1

The interval oranges would not have tasted just as sweet for the Blues' players as they once thought they might, because of those two unfortunate incidents in the final five minutes of the first half: serious injury to outstanding *animateur*, Eachain Miller, and the loss of that curious goal in added-on time. The Bacachs now could sniff an outside chance, at least, of a way back into the tie. With the advent of "Sqweg", a ready-made replacement for their young star, the Blues had attempted to re-group instantly in exactly the same shape as before, but were still struggling to find this elusive form when Chris Stone had struck. The half-time mantra surely must have been, "*Keep calm and carry on. Find the shape. The rest will follow*".

What Back clearly lacked was their own midfield generalissimo, a role Chris Macleod regularly occupies, to organize their developing talent into some coherent structure, and channel their enthusiasm into decisive forward movement. However, their young-bloods soon received early encouragement for their endeavours. As na Gormaich continued to struggle to find that elusive game-plan that had successfully delivered a 3-0 lead, Back broke

ominously and won a corner on their left. "Gordie" Maciver fired the corner across, low and fast, and Stone, on the near side of goal, 10 metres out, moved to flick the flying ball inward on its way but the curving ball appeared to sweep home inside the far post untouched before the Blues' defence could compensate (3-2).

Hopes of immediate re-grouping were thrown awry by this set-back. Individual application was still intense, but the free-flow, coordinated pressing was absent. "Barra" and "Statto" now spent most of their time chasing, as Crossley endeavoured to encompass the creative imagination he had previously borne with Miller. Fortunately for the Blues, lack of a systemic approach hampered the Bacachs' attempts to punish the Blues.

Another surge led to a Back corner on their right winging high across goal, forcing Craigie to swipe it onwards under his bar. The ball was scrambled upfield, but led to a Back free-kick on their left, midway within the Blues' half, on the touchline, which forced Mackay to attempt to head clear, but the rising ball spun rightwards. "Sqweg" tried to head the ball outwards from the right bye-line, only for it to drop neatly for Dennis Macdonald to snap-drive, but it sped just over from 16 metres on Craigie's right. A fankle in the Carloway centre, midway within their own half, saw Louie Macdonald rob "Sqweg", then steam into the Carloway half, but Mackay managed to whip the ball away as he overran it slightly.

The arrival of "Dokus" relieved Crossley's burden and Carloway gradually rediscovered new impetus, if not shape, with a raft of half-chances. "Dokus" won the ball in the centre circle, then delivered the perfect diagonal for Allan to race behind Macleod into the right of the box, but his effort from 14 metres cleared the bar by a couple of feet.

After surviving a goalmouth melée caused by a Back free-kick from the centre line, Carloway broke out down the left and a finely-placed MacDonald forward pass, between "Tolsta" and Macdonald, let "Dokus" run into the left of the box but his parting attempt was sliced low past Macliver's right-hand post. A minute later "Dokus" was supplied on the edge of the Bacach area from the right by Allan, but his instant right-footer went straight up. A minute later a free-kick on the left edge of the box was slid in by "Dokus", but an alert defender desperately booted the ball away for a corner. As the ball broke outwards from the corner, the race was on down the right of the Carloway half, but the high, swinging cross was carried by the wind and an arriving Macdonald could only glance it past the far post from 12 metres.

The evening concluded with an astonishing three minutes. Just when Carloway thought they'd done enough to meet Point in the semi-final, an 87th minute Back corner came in high from "Van Der Sar's" left. The ball was headed up and out by "D.I." but the wind swept it high back across the Blues' goal, misleading the defenders, before Allan attempted to head clear. It came down to Stone on the edge of the area and he didn't hesitate but immediately thwacked a low right-footer through the ruck of players. Miraculously, Craigie got down to paw it away, just inside his left-hand post, but Jason Macleod, on

the 6-metre line, reacted first to blast it home. What a comeback! **(3-3)**.

However, the heroes had only a minute to celebrate before Allan won the ball inside his own half and fed “Sgweg” in front of him. He, in turn, found “Dokus” inside him, and “Dokus” turned left to slip a sublime Bobby Murdoch wide of MacDonald and behind “Tolsta” for MacDonald to run free down the left and into the area. As Maciver approached, the Uibhisteach then side-footed the ball high over the keeper, but the wind caught it and bent it wide and high across goal towards the far bye-line. Allan was alert and on to it, and from 12 metres wide of goal, a few feet from the bye-line, he swept the ball back across towards the goal. It’s unclear whether or not it would have gone in anyway, but the rushing Maciver, in an attempt to boot clear, practically burst his own net instead **(4-3)**.

### **Full-time: Carloway 4 (3) Back 3 (1)**

Any spectator tonight would need to have a heart of stone not to feel some sympathy for the Back team, battling back to equality in such testing conditions, only to have this snatched away from them minutes later by the most unusual of goals. The old cliché, “*A game of two halves*”, may not be an entirely apt description of tonight’s proceedings but Carloway were certainly a different outfit altogether after the departure of Eachainn Miller in the fortieth minute. What had been a smoothly-oiled machine suddenly started to splutter, and the more the squad tried to reboot it, the more unstuck it became. Creativity and pace was effectively halved with his departure and it’s a concern to think how Carloway might function if he has a prolonged absence and Dan Crossley is suspended simultaneously.

“Sqweg”, no doubt, has the skill but perhaps not the pace, while “Dokus” has both, but perhaps not the stamina. Come in, Billy Anderson. Where are you? Likewise, with the preferred option this season a back four, no doubt to suit the skills available, “Tiger”, Mackay, “D.I.”, and “Laxay” have instantly settled into a dependable unit. Injury to key stopper, “D.I.”, would inflict further strains on the limited resources within a small squad, as would any to emerging young star, Ross Maciver, in a hectic fixture list. Constant injuries also damage motivation, which, thankfully, was never in question tonight, even though there was an extensive period during the contest, spent chasing extremely pacy young midfielders and attackers in blue.

The saying goes that it is the mark of a good, or great, side that they can grind out the positive results, even when they turn in the odd bad performance. Carloway didn’t play badly tonight but, at times, it was easy to see how a stroke of misfortune or bad luck can turn a game around, and Back could quite easily have come through tonight if the 50-50s had continued to come their way. However, Fortune is a fickle mistress and after smiling on the Bacachs for about half an hour, she decided to return her favours to na Gormaich at the end.

**Carloway Man of the Match: Jake Allan.**

**Back Man of the Match: Gordon “Gordie” Maciver.**

