

Highland Amateur Cup Round 1:

Back 1 (0) Carloway 0 (0) (after extra-time. 0-0 after 90 minutes).

Gordon "Gordie" Maciver 107

At Col Uarach, 19.00.

Friday, 13.5.16.

Ref.: George Macaskill.

Carloway line judge: Ewen Macaskill

CARLOWAY: 4-5-1.

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

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

Gordon Craigie

Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Calum Tom Moody Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Donald "D.I." MacIennan

Jake Allan Dan Crossley Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Eachainn Miller Archie "Statto" MacDonald

Fraser "Frazmac" Macleod

Subs. used: Billy Anderson (Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald) 110; Callum "Beag" Mackay (Donald "D.I." MacIennan) 110.

Subs. not used: Ross "Tiny" Maclean; Chris "Christy" Smith; "Rab" Maciver.

Yellow card: Jake Allan 120.

It was a quick return for Carloway to the scene of Monday's misery for a third meeting between the clubs within a fortnight, with honours even at present. After an exhilarating first forty minutes on 2nd May at Cnoc a' Choilich in the Jock Stein Cup, when Carloway roared into a 3-0 lead, and suggested they might engulf Back, it has been a desperately unhappy descent for the Blues. Injury to key players, of course, has been the initial cause of this decline, with Eachainn Miller, Donald "D.I." MacIennan, and Ross Maciver all side-lined for varying periods. With Dan Crossley also unavailable last Monday in the League game, this meant the team engine room had been severely weakened, and the surrounding elements struggled to cohere, despite conspicuous personal effort from all concerned.

Tonight, however, saw a welcome return for Donald "D.I." MacIennan, Dan Crossley and Eachainn Miller, though this had to be balanced against the renewed unavailability of Kenny "Beag" MacIennan, and absences on stag-night duty for Ali "Laxay" Macdonald, Kevin "Barra" Macneil, and Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod, along with Ross Maciver. "D.I." was a straight swap for "Laxay", as Calum Tom Moody made a second appearance in central defence between Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur and Domhnall Mackay, but the central midfield had to be completely re-shaped. The iron on the flanks - Jake Allan and Archie "Statto" MacDonald - continued, but inside "Barra"/"Sqweg"/"Beag" became Crossley/"Dokus"/Miller, with Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald dropping back because of the unexpected, and heartening, re-appearance of former hit-man, Fraser "Frazmac" Macleod, up front.

Another gratifying sight was the sight of Carloway's own Charlie Gallagher in the bull-pen, Billy Anderson, after his Fuengirola stag party, alongside ex-

Point star, "Rab" Maciver, veteran, Chris "Christy" Smith, and stars-in-the-making, Ross "Tiny" Maclean and Callum "Beag" Mackay. First glance suggested a much more menacing outfit than Monday's, though the unwelcome re-appearance of Bacach *animateur*, Chris Macleod, in the opposing midfield tempered this.

Another pleasant early summer's evening was marred slightly by a chilling nor'-easterly as the Blues were forced to kick-off into the piercing sunlight coming over Broadbay. Mindful, no doubt, of how a second-half loss of focus had allowed the League game to drift on and on and end up in defeat, Crossley and Miller established an early presence around the centre circle, with "Dokus" moving forward into the *trequartista* area. "Frazmac" roamed right and left to confuse Jason Macleod and Campbell Macdonald and exploit his pace behind the backs, wide. The strategy brought an initial opportunity in 5 minutes when aggressive play by Allan, seizing on a Crossley clearance just inside the right side of his half, saw him fire the ball forward for a trademark burst from "Frazmac" which propelled him towards the bye-line. However, 10 metres from the bye-line, the angle was too wide for a shot and his squared ball didn't trouble Maciver.

Moments later Back replied in similar fashion when Chris Macleod made the bye-line, 10 metres to the right of Craigie's right-hand post, only to be brought down by a Moody tackle which brought a gasp from Blues' fans, but play was waved on. On 10 minutes a long clearance down the centre was back-headed on by "Frazmac", just inside the Back half. Allan was on to it, holding off Macleod to get his shot in from 16 metres, but his powerful drive cleared Maciver's right-side bar by a metre.

In 16 minutes a series of corners led to multiple missed opportunities for na Gormaich. A "Dokus" corner from the Carloway right had to be headed out, under pressure beneath the Back bar. Miller supplied the ball right for "Dokus" to return the ball inwards a second time, but it was headed on to the left. "Statto" returned it. It was headed back out. He returned it, and Macdonald headed away for a corner by the near post. MacDonald's corner was then met perfectly by Moody in the centre but smacked the bar and was booted off for yet another corner, which, in turn, led to a scramble, the ball swept off the line, and eventually cleared. Phew!

Back were eager but Chris Macleod was having difficulty organising his young-bloods in face of concerted opposition from "Raymondo" and Miller, with "Dokus" behind him. In 30 minutes a "Dokus" free-kick, on the right touch-line, just inside the Bacach half, was headed out to "Statto" on the penalty spot, but he was falling back as he connected and the ball landed in Marybank. Four minutes later another electrifying burst, this time on the left, took "Frazmac" to the left edge of the box but he mishit his parting effort and it went straight to Maciver. A minute later another "Dokus" free-kick, 20 metres from goal to the right, was again headed outwards from the midst of a crush of bodies.

The final chance of the first half saw "Dokus" meet a breaking ball coming to

him from his right and deliver a snap shot from 24 metres which slipped low a metre past Back's left-hand post.

Half-time: Back 0 Carloway 0

in the first 45 minutes Carloway had undoubtedly edged territory and possession - and chances - , although a clear sight of Maciver in the cross-hairs hadn't really emerged. Moody's rattling of the crossbar had been as close as it got. Back had never really been out of it, but lack of control of midfield had rendered their approach, though enthusiastic, more fragmented. Fluency was a problem for both sides; Crossley and Miller had outnumbered Macleod in midfield and therefore in the creativity stakes, but neither midfield had really cohered as a unit.

Suddenly the chance of the game dropped from the heavens. A through ball/clearance came flying up the middle and as Mackay went to clear, he slipped and Louie Macdonald coasted in unhindered on Craigie. As the keeper sped out to dive at his feet, the young striker snatched at the ball, 12 metres from goal, and sent it high in a 45 angle into the stratosphere.

However, it did inspire initial Back pressure. In 52 minutes a Back free-kick from Louie Macdonald on the Back left, 30 metres from goal, led to the ball being headed clear eventually by defensive rock, Mackay. Two minutes later an exquisite Miller straight splitter from the halfway line released "Statto" behind his marker to race towards the left of the Bacach box but Maciver was alert enough to make himself big and force a toe-lob from the Uibhisteach from 18 metres which sailed well over the right of the home side's bar.

On the hour Back's first corner of the night from their right led to a frenzied melée in the Blues' box, before being cleared for another, which came to nothing. Two minutes later Allan again won the ball on the right centre line and sent "Frazmac" steaming forward but his blockbuster from 12 metres disappeared a metre over Maciver's left-hand bar.

The pace was certainly becoming frantic as the stop-clock ran down. In 68 minutes a beautiful cross-field diagonal from Crossley released MacDonald midway within the Back half to move forward, then slip to "Dokus" moving leftwards across his marker, but his right-footer from 20 metres was mishit straight up. Three minutes later a Back free-kick from the corner flag on their right created havoc in the Blues' area, three attempted head clearances delivering the ball leftwards to the feet of a Back striker whose snap-shot strike from 12 metres was somehow helped on to the bar and over by Craigie's right arm.

In 72 minutes Allan fought for the ball on the right touch-line before sending a breaker straight forward for Crossley to fire his way into the right of the Bacach box, then sweep a low daisy-cutter across goal - but it travelled well-wide of the far post. Two minutes na Gormaich broke on the left. A slow trundler cut-back from Back's right corner flag from "Dokus" found Allan beating Macleod in the centre, 12 metres out, but his right-foot flick whizzed a metre over the bar.

Two final chances arrived for na Gormaich before both sides closed everything down to prevent a late goal deciding the outcome. In 79 minutes a “Dokus” corner on the left came in under the bar and was knocked out off the line. Moody met it, 16 metres out, with a left-foot hook, but it cleared the bar by a foot. Then, two minutes later, a similar effort witnessed a “Dokus” corner bobbing around the 6-metre line before arriving with Moody, to the right and 12 metres from goal, but again his attempt flew over the bar.

After 90 minutes: Back 0 (0) Carloway 0 (0)

Another 30 minutes’ play was the last thing each side wished for, and the pace and number of chances drastically declined. Immediately a “Dokus” corner from the Carloway left was nodded over from 12 metres. In 97 minutes a miscued Mackay header from a long clearance broke to his left and Chris Macleod carried it forward across him to the right but his reverse right-footer from the edge of the box went low and well-wide of Craigie’s right-hand post.

Four minutes later “Frazmac” trickery on the left touch-line ended with a fiery right-foot cross which was met by Allan in the centre, but Maciver was adjudged to have tipped it on to the bar and over. The corner was headed out, and “Dokus”, on the edge of the box, controlled it, then slipped it leftwards, but Crossley thundered it over the bar by two metres.

Extra-time. Half-time: Back 0 (0) Carloway 0 (0)

Right away, skilful play by Miller sent Allan down the left and his early ball diagonally inwards from midway within the Back half found “Dokus” heading left across the box to outpace his marker, but his quick turn to left-foot it inwards from 12 metres towards goal was weak and trickled into Maciver’s hands.

Then, two minutes later, the oldest story in football was replayed, as a long hooked diagonal from Back’s Chris Macleod, after winning the ball towards the Bacach left, just inside the Carloway half, found “Gordie” moving swiftly behind “D.I” inside the right of the Carloway box. As “Van Der Sar” advanced, he lifted it carefully over his head for the decider (**1-0**).

Late substitutions and an all-out siege of a heavily-guarded Back goal were fruitless. A fated inevitability seemed to drop upon na Gormaich as a series of Blues’ corners and free-kicks were booted desperately into the Back area, for no return. In the final seconds, an Anderson free-kick from the centre-line towards goal was met by Moody by the far post and headed back across goal, 10 metres out. Crossley knocked it forward but it seemed to have been grasped safely by Maciver. However, the ball trickled from his grasp forward but a stretching “Frazmac” somehow managed to flick the ball high over the bar from 6 metres, as he fell backwards.

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

From a Carloway point of view, a summing-up of the Blues’ performance tonight is difficult. The players, as individuals, certainly can’t be criticised for

lack of commitment or desire to atone for the previous game and a half versus Back. They came close frequently, but, of course, not close enough.

Back perhaps had half a dozen real chances in the 120 minutes, and took one of them - "Gordie" getting in behind "D.I." and lobbing the ball over Craigie ever so neatly - not thwacking it to kingdom come, just lifting it enough. Simple, but still beautifully executed. In contrast, how many "chances" did the Blues create? As many as there are grains of sand on nearby Coll Sands, probably, but they were clearly in the realm of *"Zen and the Art of Seeing How Nearly You Can Miss"*.

You could argue the Fates were against Carloway; one of those nights, when if they had scored one, they would have scored twenty-one. At times, Carloway seemed to behave as if they were playing rugby or Gaelic football, scoring points by clearing the bar. If so, they would have won the All-Ireland Cup by a mile! Fraser Macleod was intended to score the goals tonight but, of course, his old pal, Scott Macaulay, was no longer there to drop the ball right in front of his running feet as he used to. Therefore, as often as not, "Frazmac" was on the wing, fighting to win the ball, then delivering it into the centre, for - whom? - to deliver the breakthrough.

Likewise, Dan Crossley and Eachainn Miller played well as individuals but were unable to create the chances often enough, as a coordinated midfield, as "Dokus" continually retreated to join them, Jake Allan lay wide on the right (later the left) to fight, then deliver, but there were rarely bodies awaiting that hard-earned feed in the centre. And anyway, the experienced Back defenders - "Tolsta"/"D.J."/Jason Macleod/Macdonald - held firm. Remarkably few attempts were on target. Michael Maciver - like Gordon Craigie - was certainly not overworked. The tie this evening was yet another illustrated example of the Mourinho approach to European football: ownership of territory and ball possession are not necessarily the aim; it's the creation of chances that matters, and the percentage of chances you take.

Back Man of the Match: Chris Macleod.

Carloway Man of the Match: Eachainn Miller.