

Jock Stein Cup Semi-Final:

Point 2 (0) Carloway 2 (0) (after extra-time. 1-1 after 90 minutes) **(Point win 3-2 on penalties).**

Elliot Rudall 87 Archie MacDonald 56

Alistair Gillies 98 (pen.) Jake Allan 96

At Garrabost.

Wednesday, 18.5.16.

Referee: Willie "Mashie" Macleod.

Stand-side line judge: Kenneth "Bugsy" Smith.

Far-side line judge: Neil Macritchie.

CARLOWAY: 4-4-2.

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

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

Gordon Craigie

Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Ali "Laxay" Macdonald Donald "D.I." MacIennan Joe Armstrong

Calum "Beag" Mackay Kevin "Barra" Macneil Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Archie "Statto" MacDonald

Jake Allan Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald

Subs. used: Andrew "Dalmore" Macleod (Calum "Beag" Mackay) 110; Chris "Christy" Smith (Andrew "Dalmore" Macleod) 116.

Subs. not used: Jake Macleod; Euan Gilmour; Eachain Miller.

Yellow card: Donald "D.I." MacIennan 100.

POINT: 4-4-2

Manager: Angus "Stoodie" Mackay.

Ally "Wally" Maciver Stewart Munro

Elliot Rudall Donald "Spike" Smith Andrew Murray Hugh Morrison

Alec Lamb Alistair Gillies(capt.) Angus Macdonald Stephen Kettings

Ally Lamont

Subs. used: Andrew Morrison (Donald "Spike" Smith) 57; Andrew "Mowgli" Macleod (Stephen Kettings) 80; Daniel Macleod (Alec Lamb) 90.

Yellow card: Stewart Munro 88.

Carloway's early season hopes have evaporated rather swiftly, with stunning ABC Cup success morphing swiftly into two League reverses and a first round exit from the prestigious HAC. The heady atmosphere engendered by that HAC run in season 2014 and Final appearance in Inverness now seems to have taken place in some distant past, especially when we consider last season's Round 1 defeat also, ironically to tonight's opponents. Injuries have wrought havoc with the Blues' small squad so far, and imminent suspensions for two others, Dan Crossley and Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur, will deepen this (Dan will miss the Lochs and Benbecula games, whilst Cameron will miss the Lochs match).

Already, any League aspirations have surely vanished. Avoiding the wooden spoon seems to be a more realistic goal. Meeting one of the sides which has contributed to this pessimism tonight, at Garrabost, another ground on na Gormaich's inverse bucket list, "*Places We Least Like to Visit*", was distinctly unwelcome, even less so if last season's two thrashings here, 0-4 in the

League and 1-6 in the Moldova Lewis, are clearly remembered. The perceived injustices undergone in the former - the loss of an "offside" goal; a disputed penalty, then yellow card for "Laxay" - no doubt still rankle, but more immediate weaknesses need attention, firstly managing to get goal attempts on target, something that proved particularly elusive in the last two games versus Back.

While creating chances was also a problem in the first game at Col Uarach, and has been for some time, it certainly wasn't in the second. Keeping attempted shots beneath the ozone layer was, though. With "Dokus" playing deep, and "Statto" and Allan wide, young Ross Maciver is the only obvious "centre-forward", a heavy responsibility for a young star still learning his craft to carry.

The first surprise tonight was the members of the squad, or, more precisely, those who weren't in it. A lengthy list of those unavailable included: Ross "Tiny" Maclean, Calum Tom Moody, Murdo "Sqweg" Macleod, "Rab" Maciver, Billy Anderson, and Ross Maciver, while Dan Crossley was ruled out because of continuing knee problems. Also, Eachainn Miller had picked up an injury in Tuesday's Under-18 match and only appeared on the bench in case of emergencies, beside Chris "Christy" Smith, Andrew "Dalmore" Macleod and debutant, Euan Gilmour. One man's loss is another man's gain. Such absences allowed Joe Armstrong and Callum "Beag" Mackay to start for the Blues, at left-back and right-wing respectively, with "Laxay" moving rightwards to centre-back, alongside "D.I.", allowing new dad, Domhnall Mackay, to make his 300th appearance for the club in his favoured position of holding midfielder.

Garrabost now out-ranks Fivepenny as the coldest place on earth. A freezing easterly assisted Carloway to achieve an early control, despite the new arrangement of personnel. A fluid formation, shifting between 4-4-2 and 4-5-1, with individual roles ever-changing, still gelled quickly and pressed forward 1000% more purposefully than they had done in the Back games. In 7 minutes a "Dokus" free-kick from the centre line was propelled forward by the wind through the defensive line and Lamont had to move smartly to his left to claw the flying ball round his post.

This led to a series of dangerous, wind-assisted corners, which were scrambled away to the Rubhachs' right, which led to another Carloway free-kick, 10 metres inside the touch-line, winging in from MacDonald, 20 metres from the bye-line. Again it was knocked out, this time to "Dokus" 20 metres from goal in the centre, and he immediately slipped it right to Allan, but his thumping right-foot drive was blocked away for another corner to his left by Gillies.

At this point, Point were struggling against the wind and an aggressive opposition to gain a foothold in midfield and pressure forward into the Blues' half. Rudall was subdued, though "Spike" prevailed as combative as always, but isolated. To kick-start things, "Wally" came right after 20 minutes, with Hugh Morrison slotting in behind and inside him; Murray moved left. However,

two further chances arrived for na Gormaich: in 25 minutes the pace of another "Dokus" free-kick, from the left centre line, carried it beyond everyone to Lamont, before a neat, inter-passing movement on the right between "Beag", Allan, and "Barra" sent Macneil free on the right. From 18 metres he flashed across a high cross, which Angus Macdonald, by the near post, headed on dangerously, across his own goal and beyond the far post for another corner.

Finally, Point gauged the wind and gained a free-kick, 10 metres inside the Carloway half, towards the Rubhach right. Gillies sent in an inviting right-footed diagonal which dropped neatly for "Wally", dropping off the line by the far post, 12 metres out, but he had stepped forward a moment too early and was off-side. Moments later Macdonald burst forward through the centre, then delivered a glorious diagonal to "D.I.'s" left and behind Armstrong, for "Wally" to race forward into the right side of the box unhindered, but "Van Der Sar" read the danger and was out to get a foot to the inviting ball an inch before Maciver.

The chances became fewer for both sides as Point finally confronted the Blues in the centre of the field and a savage unarmed warfare ensued, mainly between Rudall, "Barra", Smith, and Mackay. In 37 minutes a gigantic "D.I." clearance downfield was chased by Allan but Lamont shot from his goal to punch the awkwardly bouncing ball to the right, as Allan came crashing into him.

Half-time: Point 0 Carloway 0

A main talking point at the interval was whether or not Point could employ the still-raging easterly to their advantage, as Carloway had done in the first half-hour, though the Blues must have been bitterly ruing their continuing inability to find the net, 291 minutes and counting since "Statto" headed home against the Rubhachs in the League at Cnoc a' Choilich. Apart from that, and that's a big "*Apart from that*", it had been an encouraging first half for na Gormaich: the back-line had been ferociously stonewall; the midfield had combined and moved threateningly as a unit; and "Beag" and "Statto" were continually stretching the Point back-line thin. However, the combativeness of Rudall, Smith, and Murray was growing and "Wally", Lewis's own Thierry Henry, can never really be marked out.

The opening five minutes immediately reminded Carloway of the task ahead. In 46 minutes a long Gillies clearance was chased into the right of the Carloway box by Munro, but under pressure from "D.I.", he snatched at the ball, 14 metres out, and it rocketed off towards Aignish. Five minutes later, "Laxay" was robbed on the left edge of the box by "Wally", who moved forward, then checked back and inwards, and sent a beautiful right-footer from 16 metres, curving round Craigie, but somehow he managed to curl it outside the far post. A minute later Craigie inexplicably didn't notice "Wally" lurking outside the box to his right when he took a short goal-kick and passed the ball right to him. Maciver overcame his surprise swiftly and sent the neatest of lobs over the stranded keeper. However, the angle was tight and

the ball bounced on top of the bar and carried over.

Two minutes later a real chance materialized for the Blues as an exquisite diagonal from “Dokus” freed “Beag” down the right behind Lamb. The young star’s nasty head-high cross was met by the near post by Macdonald, 14 metres out. However, his header was miscued backwards across his own goal, but it arrived too fast for any takers. A minute later na Gormaich edged in front when a “Laxay” break from defence fed Allan on the right centre-line. His high up-and-under dropped down around the penalty spot and “Statto” just beat Lamont to it to glance it neatly inside the keeper’s left-hand post (**0-1**).

It was 68 minutes before the next real opportunity arrived as Carloway broke in numbers out of defence and “Laxay” found “Dokus” moving forward into the Point half. Midway within the half, in the centre, he slipped a golden diagonal wide of Macdonald and behind Lamb for Allan to come in at speed from the right. However, Lamont was out like lightning to block the low drive from 14 metres with his right leg brilliantly.

In 81 minutes a long clearance by Gillies was caught by the wind and as Munro raced unchallenged into the left of the Carloway box, “Laxay” came from nowhere to get across and pull off a remarkable sliding tackle, which averted the threat.

Just when it seemed the Rubhachs were running out of ideas on how to pierce a cast-iron Blues’ defence, they unexpectedly equalized. On the Carloway left, 20 metres from the bye-line, and ten from the touch-line, an inviting “Wally” free-kick cleared the defence in the centre and Rudall, coming in at the back-post, reverse-headed it across “Van Der Sar” and inside the far post (**1-1**).

This knocked the Blues off-balance and they had to endure the final few minutes and three minutes’ added-on time as a fired-up Point roared forward. Indeed, in the 92nd minute, another “Wally” free-kick, this time in the centre, 22 metres out, was flighted perfectly over the wall, clipped the top of Craigie’s right-hand bar, and went over.

After 90 minutes: Point 1 (0) Carloway 1 (0)

Point continued their offensive immediately, with “Wally” being sent through the centre by no. 15. He made 20 metres from goal, before slipping the ball diagonally left for Munro to cut in sharply but Craigie smothered his low drive from 16 metres to his left. A moment later a long ball forward from Mackay was beating Gillies, but MacDonald, on the edge of the box, could not control the awkwardly bouncing ball, and it spun forward and away from him.

In 96 minutes it was Mackay’s turn to win a tussle by Point’s right-hand corner flag, then lift an up-and-under square across goal. Allan read its fall beautifully by the near post, to volley home expertly from 12 metres, just inside Lamont’s right-hand post (**1-2**).

A minute later Point drew level, via the penalty spot, as "Wally" was adjudged to have been held back by "Tiger." when no. 15 had played a high ball diagonally forward from the right. The award was not well-received by those from the west, but Gillies ignored this to drive a powerful low shot under the rightwards-diving Craigie (2-2).

It was, once again, end-to-end stuff as each side saw the decisive nature of the next goal. In 102 minutes, "Dokus" sent a neat free-kick from 20 metres, in the centre, over the wall but Lamont had time to see it coming and dropped on it carefully, low to his right. Then, two minutes later, the final "moment" of the half involved yet another "Dokus" free-kick, 24 metres out, cannoning of a Point head in the wall for a corner.

Extra-time; half-time: Point 2 Carloway 2

As each side became ever more cautious in the final period, only one further chance arrived for either. In 108 minutes a final "Dokus" free-kick, just in from the touch-line on Carloway's left, 10 metres out, was headed out to MacDonald on the edge of the box but his instant right-footer ended up in Broadbay. Then, after a lengthy delay because of an unfortunate injury to Andrew "Dalmore" Macleod, Carloway had to endure a final heart-stopping moment in 117 minutes, when "Wally" won the ball by their right corner flag, then sent across the neatest of low, square balls, which was met by Munro, 10 metres out by the near post, but, heavily-pressured by "D.I.", he had no space to control the ball and his flick went straight up.

Full-time: Point 2 (2) Carloway 2 (2)

If this had been the final score in a League game, this would have been a creditable result for both sides, although Carloway lived to regret that failure to capitalize on their first-half edge. It does not need a crystal ball to figure out how, with the greater number of chances created, they have ended up booted out of another cup. Both back-lines had been sound throughout, with a special mention for Joe Armstrong having a second baptism of fire against Point (last season he had débuted against an on-fire Sam Macsween!!!!) Calum "Beag" performed admirably also, pitted against the experienced Alec Lamb, and the unexpected midfield line-up competed impressively for large periods of the game, against a side which had threatened to engulf them a fortnight ago.

Difficulties still remain: the ratio of chances created to chances on target/taken, and a tendency to over-egg the sandwich at rather tricky moments in defence or in the opponents' penalty area, but, overall, this was an encouraging display, despite the eventual result. There is definite room for optimism, if this approach can be maintained. A major difference tonight seemed to be attitude, although the introduction of pacy, skilled youth and sustained aggression in defence/midfield must be factors in a positive performance. The re-introduction of creative oversight (e.g. through Crossley, Miller, Anderson, etc.) to augment that of "Dokus" will be invaluable in the final mix, but the inclusion of a dedicated goal-scorer (e.g. Ross Maciver, etc.)

might be even more decisive.

Penalties: Carloway went first:

CARLOWAY

POINT

~~X~~ Kevin "Barra" Macneil misses 0-0

✓ Alistair Gillies scores 0-1

✓ Domhnall Mackay scores 1-1

✓ Angus Macdonald scores 1-2

~~X~~ Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald saved by Ally Lamont 1-2 ~~X~~ Andy Murray saved by Gordon Craigie 1-2

✓ Donald "D.I." MacIennan scores 2-2 ✓ Ally "Wally" Maciver scores 2-3

~~X~~ Archie "Statto" MacDonald saved by Ally Lamont 2-3

Point Man of the Match: Ally "Wally" Maciver.

Carloway Man of the Match: Donald "D.I." MacIennan.