

Eilean an Fhraoich Cup Final :

Lochs 2 (0) Carloway 4 (1)

Jim O'Donnell 62

Robert Mackenzie 87

Angus Grant 25

Graeme Mackenzie (own goal) 63

Eachainn Miller 70

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald 77

At Creagan Dubh, Leurbost.

Friday, 12.8.14, 7 p.m.

Referee: Neil Macritchie.

Stand-side line judge: Andrew Macaulay.

Far-side line judge: Calum "Chancy" Macleod.

CARLOWAY: 4-5-1.

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

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

Jack MacIennan (United).

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

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Domhnall Mackay (capt.) John "Uig" Morrison (Lochs) Eachainn Miller

Dan Crossley

Angus Grant

Subs. used: Andrew "Tago" MacIiver (John "Uig" Morrison) 68; Kevin "Barra" Macneil (Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur) 72; Callum "Beag" Mackay (Angus Grant) 87.

Subs. not used: Gordon Craigie; Hamish MacDonald.

LOCHS: 4-4-2

Manager: David Macmillan.

Jim O'Donnell  Gordon "Gordie" Maciver (Back)

Ross Allison (Athletic) David Macmillan  Robert Mackenzie  Neil Houston

Graeme Mackenzie Donald "Nomie" Macdonald Peter Mackenzie (capt.) Ali "Koch" Morrison (Athletic)

Gordon "Gordie" Mackenzie (United)

Subs. used: David Macritchie (Peter Mackenzie) 27 ; Peter "Robbie" Mackenzie (Gordon "Gordie" Maciver) 67; Daniel "Nipper" Mackenzie (?) 83; Connor Maciver; Callum Masson (Athletic).

Yellow cards: David Macmillan 56; Robert Mackenzie 69; David Macritchie 74; Jim O'Donnell. 78.

So, for the **SEVENTH** time, Carloway headed down the Eilean an Fhraoich road, hoping to emerge as happily as Dorothy did at the end of the Yellow Brick one, with a gleaming trophy for the first time. No wizard to help tonight, unfortunately. This evening was just another day at the office for the men of Leurbost, of course, who are one of the most successful clubs in island history, having appeared in this final an incredible **27** times and won it **15** times (!!!).

Of course, having won a trophy 15 times doesn't mean a team is any less keen to win it a 16th time. However, their last victory was in 2007, 5-0 versus Point, and they went on to suffer misery the following year and in 2013 at the hands of perennial EaF finalists, Westside. The Blues themselves don't have great love for their west Lewis neighbours either in this competition, losing 1-2 in 2014 and 2012 to the Siarachs. Before that, it was the Hearachs, in 1999, who inflicted the coup de grâce,

2-4, on Blues' hopes.

Another surprising statistic about tonight's game was that the two sides had never met in an EaF final in its 83-year history. Unfortunately for na Gormaich, this first meeting of the sides had to take place on the Lochs' home ground. The why and wherefores of this curious decision has already had enough air-time on islandfooty.

Creagan Dubh, of course, is not high on Carloway's list of "*Places We Have Always Wanted to Visit*" (or Sgoil nan Loch for that matter). Usually a night of despair is in prospect. A historian would have to go all the way back to May 2013 to find the last time the Blues won at either ground, which happened to be an astonishing 5-1 League win at the latter, courtesy of Kevin "Gochan" Macleod, Calum Tom Moody, Dan Crossley, and Seumas Macleod, with David Martin scoring for the Maroons, but that was during Carloway's *annus mirabilis*. Ah, where are these heroes now?

Since then, it has not exactly been fun visiting Creagan Dubh: an opening day League draw the following season, 1-1, was followed by 1-3 Jock Stein and 1-4 ML defeats. In 2015 a 2-2 League draw succeeded two Cup exits within four days, 0-1 and 1-2 in the Jock Stein and ABC. This season the sides have only met once, in the League at Cnoc a' Choilich, when a Jim O'Donnell hat-trick kept Lochs' League challenge on track, 1-3.

Not the greatest of records for the Blues then, but tonight "Windy" was cheered by a full squad availability, plus the eligibility and fitness of John "Uig" Morrison and Jack MacIannan, arguably the best young keeper on the island, knowing he would need them all, as he surveyed the opposition: an imposing central defence of Peter Mackenzie and Donald "Nomie" Macdonald, backing the combative Robert Mackenzie and David Macmillan, and leading the line, Back's troublesome Gordon "Gordy" MacIver flanking the guy the boys in blue must hate the sight of, Jim O'Donnell. The Blues were grateful, however, to see the combative left back/wing half, Daniel "Nipper" Mackenzie only making the bench and the absence of elegant midfielders, Andy Murray and Angie Campbell, both ineligible. Angie's task for the evening? Directing traffic in the car park! What a waste!

A lowering sky hovering low over Creagan Dubh did not augur well for the evening's weather though the absence of rain (at the outset) and wind throughout did provide the requisite conditions for controlled football. For the opening half-hour, an infestation of midges was the main natural problem. However, both midfields had more to contend with. It was a case of a rock meeting a hard place, as Mackay and "Uig" confronted Macmillan and Robert Mackenzie, and behind each, "D.I.", "Laxay", "Nomie" and Peter Mackenzie were impenetrable. With Graeme Mackenzie on top of "Dokus" on the right and not being teased out by the wingman lying deeper than the Marianna Trench, the focus moved left where Miller and Crossley tested "Koch" early for pace.

From the whistle Miller, on the centre-line, squared to Crossley who took off like a

bullet down the touch-line past the Athletic man and the supporting “Nomie” to the Lochs' bye-line. His sharp low cross whizzed across goal, 8 metres out, just out of “Gordie’s” reach but the arriving Grant could not quite make the connection. Further pressure saw a “Dokus” corner from the Carloway right met by Mackay, 12 metres out by the near post, but the covering back by the far post managed to head on his header for another corner on the left. Na Gormaich’s early grip on midfield led to a Mackay free-kick, 10 metres inside the Maroons’ half and 10 metres in from the bye-line, drop awkwardly in front of “Gordie”, the bouncing ball deflecting forward off “Nomie”. The keeper managed to push it outwards, and Grant, 10 metres from the line, got his head to it but could only nudge it forward to Mackenzie.

The Blues continued to exploit the left and another blistering run from Crossley from his own box, the length of the park, ended with him checking in square, 24 metres from goal, but his sizzling right-foot daisy-cutter was read perfectly by “Gordie” low to his left. A minute later affairs got just that little bit more difficult for the Lochs with the temporary absence of iconic defensive bulwark, Peter Mackenzie, with a thigh strain, “Koch” moving in beside “Nomie” and Houston coming left. Nevertheless, the Maroons still contrived to flex their muscles in the 22nd minute as “Gordie” Maciver nodded the ball back to Robert Mackenzie to his left, and the midfielder then moved into the Carloway half at speed, to send a glorious Bobby Murdoch high over :D.I.” and behind “Tiger” for O’Donnell to race into the left of the Blues’ box. As MacIennan charged out to block, the striker flashed a low left-footer past the young keeper across goal, but unfortunately a metre wide of the far post.

Three minutes later the score sheet was opened when “Nomie” appeared to get in a fankle as Lochs started to play out of defence, 24 metres out in the centre, and was robbed by Miller who emulated Crossley to make the left bye-line. His whipped-in low cross was met by Grant, sliding in in the centre before the covering Mackenzie, to find the net to the left of “Gordie” (0-1).

Once more the men from Leurbost regrouped with the final retiral of Peter M., “Koch” returning left and David Macritchie taking the centre spot. Immediately a perfect Robert M. ball released Allison on the left. As “Tiger” closed, his strike was low but directly placed at MacIennan, who had made himself big to block the shot from the edge of the box, 10 metres out.

As the game evened out, the home side had yet another chance, this time Macmillan winning the ball in the centre-circle, wall-passing with Robert M, on his right, then turning in to his left, 30 metres from goal, to fire in a nasty, curling left-footer which forced MacIennan to pull off the save of the match so far, pawing away for a corner high to his left. The half concluded with “Gordie” equalling MacIennan, anticipating yet another low, fired cross, 10 metres from the bye-line, from Crossley on the left, to move out fast to drop on the flying ball by his far post, just a foot in front of the charging Grant.

Half-time: Lochs 0 Carloway 1

The first half had been interesting, though hardly exciting - a war of attrition rather, punctuated by bursts of insightful play from Robert M., Macmillan, Miller, and Crossley, whose electrifying bursts of pace on the left had been the highlights of the half, though "Koch", perhaps, might not agree. Grant had managed to be a pain to "Nomie" and Peter M., though O'Donnell must have regretted his early unlucky slice of fortune. Na Gormaich had edged it, certainly in the early part, though "*the sleeping giant*" metaphor always comes to mind when a team scores first against Lochs, the original whole-game, 90-minute exponents.

David Macmillan had obviously charged the squad's batteries over the half-time Bovril, or blown their ears off, as the Maroons came out of the starting blocks to push, and push. In 47 minutes a Macmillan diagonal from the centre saw Allison make the bye-line on the left, but "D.I." made the clearance from his cross, under pressure, 12 metres out in the centre. Moments later, Carloway escaped again when "Tiger", coming in quickly from his right, blocked an Allison strike on the left from 20 metres which might just have crept past Maclennan, low to his right.

Finally, pressure told as Lochs, sweating blood from the off, appeared to gain the break-through in 62 minutes: a Maciver corner on their right was scrambled clear in the centre, but returned from the right, the high diagonal being met by ace strike-force, O'Donnell, in the centre, 16 metres from goal, and his powerful header gave the United *torwächter* no chance high to his left (1-1).

However, as so often happens, a side who have fought so long to get back on equal terms, subconsciously relaxes to gain wind to go for a winner, and then is caught cold at the other end. An immediate gigantic forward free-kick from "Dokus" dropped tantalising behind the Lochs back-line, but just forward of "Gordie's" reach, and as Mackay and Graeme Mackenzie went for it, it appeared to be nudged on to the defender's knee and onwards to the right of the surprised keeper. Bizarre, or what? Still, they all count (1-2).

The goal instantly shifted the balance back to na Gormaich, as a deflated Lochs once more had to chase the game, after thinking they had caught up going into the final straight. Carloway, now, were quite happy to sit back and frustrate, then hit hard on the break. However, as the incessant deluge continued, skilful, incisive moves became difficult, and players' frustrations increased. As Macmillan and Robert M. tried to inspire the troops forward, their midfield and defence moved forward, and the long ball increasingly attracted Carloway.

In 70 minutes a Mackay right-footer, high from just inside the Carloway centre, swirled into the left of the Maroons' box. "Gordie" was out like a shot to boot clear from the feet of Grant, but the ball came straight to Miller, approaching on the left of the centre-line. Quick-thinking informed the young star to send the ball whizzing low and forwards through retreating defenders and into the centre of the unguarded goal (1-3).

Twenty minutes left and Lochs had a lot to do, but how often have this team been written off and stormed back? The chances continued to appear for the Blues as Lochs pressed for a counter and in 77 minutes a bullet-like Crossley dash, fed by Miller down the left, saw him outpace their right defence, then fox his marker inwards along the bye-line, to send the perfect ball low to "Dokus" coming towards him, 12 metres out. "Gordie" did his best, dashing out to lie flat, but "Dokus" side-stepped him neatly leftwards to sweep home a left foot clincher to the left of the covering defender (1-4).

With the Maroons it is never "*nearly all over*" and they battered away gamely through 5½ minutes of added-on time, their only consolation a spontaneous Robert M. lobbed shot from 25 metres, in the 87th minute, from the centre, which carried high and wide to the left of an alert Jack MacIennan, 10 metres out of his goal to reduce the deficit. (2-4).

Full-time: Lochs 2 Carloway 4

So, yet another cross off Carloway's back, no longer having to hear a celestial chorus in their dressing room, chanting, "*won everything now but have NEVER won the Eilean an Fhraoich*". Did they deserve it? Tricky word this "*deserve*". They scored four; Lochs scored two - that should be the end of the story. Na Gormaich certainly were in the ascendancy in the first half-hour, and remained dangerous thereafter, though Lochs equalled them in the next 15 minutes of the first half, and forced the pace in the opening twenty of the second, but then Carloway took charge again after their second goal. The final part of the game was make-or-break stuff, simply because Lochs, 1-2 down, had to push, and, arguably, the chances for Carloway's third and fourth would not have occurred, if Lochs had not displayed such all-out commitment to get back into the tie, leaving the door unlocked at the back.

Of course, they had to. It was a cup final, after all. And Carloway responded efficiently to the challenge set. The Blues' management must have been delighted at the commitment and effort of the squad against such class opposition and in such Biblical conditions, a performance which displayed no weaknesses, with everyone remaining on-message for the 95½ minutes and carrying the club on to their second 7 match-winning sequence of the 2016 season. Hopefully, another victory on Wednesday, versus Point at Cnoc a' Choilich, will lead to a third successful cup run, this time in the final tournament of the season, the Moldova Lewis.

Lochs Man of the Match: Robert Mackenzie.

Carloway Man of the Match: Eachainn Miller.