

Co-op Cup Round 1:

## **Barra 2 (0) Carloway 8 (4)**

*James Davidson 46, 82*   *Gordon "Tago" MacDonald 9*  
*Dan Crossley 11, 86*  
*Domhnall Mackay 23 (pen.)*  
*Eachainn Miller 32, 55, 67*  
*Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur 83*

*At Lionacleit, Benbecula.*

*Saturday, 10<sup>th</sup> June 2017. 1.15 p.m.*

*Referee: Paul McGuire*

*Barra line judge: ?*

*Carloway line judge: Stuart "Gochan" Macleod*

**CARLOWAY: 4-5-1.**

*Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.*

*Asst. Managers: Domhnall Mackay; Iain Angus "Gus" Maciver.*

*Andrew Macleod*

*Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur   Domhnall Mackay (capt.)   Donald "D.I." MacIennan   Joe Armstrong  
Jordan Macleod   Eachainn Miller   Archie "Statto" MacDonald   Kenny "Dokus" MacDonald   Gordon  
"Tago" MacDonald*

*Dan Crossley*

*Subs. used: Kenny "Beag" MacIennan (Archie "Statto" MacDonald) 53; Ben Smith (Gordon "Tago" MacDonald) 70; Callum "Beag" Mackay (Kenny "Dokus" MacDonald) 78; Andrew "Lanky" Macdonald (Joe Armstrong) 87; Jake Macleod (Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur) 89.*

*Yellow cards: None.*

Another day on the road for na Gormaich, this time beginning with a 6.30 a.m. start (don't the boys just love them?) to the Southern Isles and Lionacleit, a venue which evokes mixed memories for the Blues. Unfortunately, most grounds do for our heroes; even Rally Park in Tarbert has hosted some unfortunate evenings featuring na Gormaich - remember August 2009 and a guy called Steven Lennie? Last year was the lochdar Saints' nightmare here, of course, when late call-offs condemned an understrength Carlway to a 1-5 thrashing, a Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald goal their only consolation. The season earlier was slightly more gratifying with a 3-1 victory over Eriskay, again with a makeshift side, and goals from Domhnall Mackay, Ali "Laxay" Macdonald, and Stuart "Gochan" Macleod, but later they met today's opponents in the Semi-Final and despite early control and two goals from Angus Grant, they allowed the tie to slip away from them and eventually succumbed to a 2-3 defeat, courtesy of a James Davidson winner in added-on time.

In 2014, they were slightly more successful against today's opponents in the HAC, coming from behind to triumph 4-2, thanks to Archie "Statto" MacDonald and a "Frazmac" hat-trick, and this set them off on their journey towards Inverness and Avoch. So, a history here, best forgotten: *"The heart knoweth his own bitterness"*.

Today there were only a few absentees: neither David Beaton, Gordon "Van Der Sar" Craigie was available, so young Andrew Macleod made his first appearance this season between the sticks; Kevin "Gochan" Macleod, Billy Anderson, and Andrew "Tago" Maciver were also unable to travel and crucial lynch-pin, Ali "Laxay" Macdonald, had the nerve to go on holiday. Honestly, these guys!

This entailed Domhnall Mackay dropping back to central defence, but, of course, Eachainn Miller, ineligible last week in Avoch, could now play and joined “Statto” and “Dokus” in the engine room, the last switching from right midfield and this enabled up-and-coming star, Jordan Macleod, to test the Barra left. Fans’ favourite, veteran Gordon “Tago” Macdonald, and much-missed *trequartista*, Dan Crossley, made their first starts of 2017 on the left, and up front.

As with Avoch, Barra’s quality was an unknown and could only be assumed by reference to results and League position, in competition with other sides whose level can also only be a guess. However, they did win this cup in 2015, beating Lochs, Carloway, and Point en route to success, so caution in the first ten minutes or so had to be key.

The heavy clouds and lashing rain soon disappeared as the squad made their way south through beautiful fields of wild lilies in full bloom to the Sports Centre Field. Barra seemed to have the first-half advantage, playing westwards with the wind, a strong south-easterly blowing diagonally across the park from corner flag to corner flag, but its swirling nature made aerial passing questionable. More worrying for them, it was immediately apparent Miller, Crossley, and Macleod were “*in the mood*”, each desperate for the ball, not afraid of it, and determined to take on their markers whenever possible. It made for an uncomfortable opening half for na Baraich. After three minutes, broken play in the centre circle saw Miller find “Dokus” circling over to the right touch-line. Twenty metres from the line, he performed his characteristic check and switch leftwards and inwards to fire in a left-footer which was blocked outwards on the 6-metre line, hit Crossley coming in to challenge, and swirled upwards and over Lapsley’s bar by a metre.

Concerted pressure continued with “Dokus”, “Statto”, and Miller winning the midfield battle, keeping the Carloway line high, and in 9 minutes an inevitable opener arrived. Just inside Barra’s right touch-line and 22 metres from the bye-line, “Dokus” flighted in an inviting free-kick which led to a skirmish around the penalty spot, a loud penalty claim, and the ball booted out towards the Barra right touch-line. Armstrong, coming forward on the touch-line and 20 metres from the bye-line, immediately delivered a perfect cross which found Miller in the centre, 14 metres from goal. Facing leftwards, he had time to control the ball, then lift it delicately to his left where an unmarked “Tago”, 12 metres from goal and just outside Lapsley’s right-hand post, crashed a waist-high left-footer to the left of the helpless keeper (**0-1**).

Barra had not steadied before the lead was doubled. Two minutes later, after more tussles in the centre circle, Miller fired the ball straight forward low for Crossley, but “Raymondo” had drifted left off his marker in mistaken anticipation. The Barra centre-back ushered the ball towards the approaching keeper but just as he bent to pick it up, Crossley exploded from the left and nipped the ball rightwards out of his hands. As Lapsley and the defender scrambled goal-wards, the young star dragged the ball forward a moment on the right then swept a low right-footer diagonally home in the centre (**0-2**).

Three minutes later a mixture of pace and skill sent Crossley charging down the right past two defenders. Ten metres short of the bye-line he whipped over a high cross/shot which eluded everyone in the centre but crept a metre wide of the far

post. In 23 minutes it got even harder for the Southerners when “Tiger”, moving into the Barra half on their left, played a diagonal forward to Miller running rightwards on the edge of the Barra box, then inwards. Twelve metres from goal, a clumsy tackle from behind by no. 11, brought him down. There was no protest. Mackay thumped the ball high into Lapsley’s top left corner as the keeper chose right (**0-3**).

It was 28 minutes before Barra tested Macleod, a Davidson free-kick 20 metres from goal towards the right of the box coming in hard and low to the young keeper’s left but he reacted fast to push it away to his left. In 32 minutes the game entered exhibition mode: for the Blues, that is; torture mode for those in black and red. A scintillating run by Macleod took him to the right touch-line before flashing across a low cross which Crossley met just outside the near post but was blocked for a corner. “Tago”, Carloway’s ace dead-ball taker, dropped the ball perfectly in the centre, 10 metres from goal, where Miller, falling backwards, hooked the ball with his right-foot past the keeper (**0-4**).

In 44 minutes Miller surged off on yet another run, shaking off an attempted tackle in the centre, past another just inside the Barra box on the right, to find Crossley to his left, but Lapsley was out like a shot to block him brilliantly from 12 metres.

**Half-time: Barra 0 Carloway 4**

It was difficult to suggest what Martin Macphee could do to alter the pattern of play, as the main difference - and it was a big, big one - between the sides was pace, and a change in tactics, formation, personnel, whatever, can't really contain this or spirit it up in your own side. An attempt at some form of containment, however, was the only possibility. And immediately, there was a small ray of sunshine.

A through ball came to “D.I.” in the centre, 10 metres outside his area, and he transferred it left to Mackay, but the ball didn’t run kindly for the captain and he was challenged by Davidson as he struggled to control it. The ball broke behind him to his left and Davidson won it, clear, then reverse-checked into the area. As the young keeper came forward, the striker hooked an early, left-foot daisy-cutter low to his left (**1-4**).

However, despite the replacement of the ebullient Uibhisteach, “Statto”, with Kenny “Beag” Macleannan, due to a nasty leg injury, the pattern of the contest did not change. In 55 minutes a pass-back to Lapsley left the keeper under pressure and he flicked the ball forward to his right to no.5, 22 metres from goal. The defender got into a fankle trying to turn with the ball and Miller was on him in a flash to gain the ball, then run in unhindered into the left of the box. As the keeper moved out, the young ace coolly stabbed a careful right-footer just inside his left-hand post (**1-5**). Beautifully-taken!

Immediately Barra broke on their right, no. 27 in the centre freeing no. 17 to surge forward diagonally into the box, but Macleod blocked his stormer of a drive outwards, low by his right-hand post, and Mackay humped it clear. Midway through the half, another close call for na Baraich arrived when a high forward diagonal from “Dokus”, midway within the Barra half, on the left, was met by Macleod running behind the line on the right but his high looping header from 16 metres was touched on to the top of his right-hand bar by Lapsley and over.

A minute later the keeper was again in action, saving superbly when Crossley was sent clear through the middle by Maclennan. "Raymondo" held off his marker easily to make 16 metres from goal towards the right, but the keeper still managed to block low to his right, and away towards his right corner flag. Macleod gave chase and caught the ball 16 metres from goal on the bye-line. He then stroked a perfect low pass straight back to the arriving Miller on the edge of the box, and his exquisite right-foot drive zoomed high into Lapsley's top-left corner, despite the keeper doing well to get a touch to it (1-6).

There was no respite. In 80 minutes a Smith corner on the Carloway right reached "Dokus" by the near corner of the box, but his immediate right-foot stab disappeared high past the Barra left-hand post. The arrival of the pace and tenacity of Callum "Beag" Mackay intensified the pressure but a sudden break by Barra through a high Blues' centre and defence saw a stunning dribble by no.23 take him on a cross-wise path past "Tiger" and "D.I.". He then slipped the ball beyond Mackay to an unmarked Davidson, 12 metres out in front of goal, and once again, the tireless striker wasted no time in whacking it home, low to Maciver's left (2-6).

However, a minute later, the wheels were no longer just off the Barra bogey; they were lost in the undergrowth, as a result of a curious, if momentous goal. From the restart, Carloway surged forward and Callum "Beag", Smith, and Miller combined just inside the Barra half in the centre to supply "Tiger" moving forward to the right-wing position. As the Barra line retreated, Macarthur lifted a high, inviting ball diagonally into the centre. Lapsley, guarding his near post, saw the danger too late as the wind took control of the ball and carried it inwards and over his head to drop neatly into the far corner of goal, beneath the junction of bar and post, despite the best efforts of a defender to keep it out (2-7). **"Tiger's" first-ever strike for Carloway!!!** What a guy!

The Barra Boys' misery was not yet complete, however. Four minutes from time Kenny "Beag" won the ball in midfield and sent Macleod off on a glorious run down the right. He left his marker in his slipstream as he reached the bye-line and whizzed across a low sharp cross which the racing Crossley met perfectly, by the near post, 12 metres from goal. Again, the keeper did well to get his hands to it but its power carried it onwards and into his left-hand net (2-8).

**Full-time: Barra 2 (0) Carloway 8 (4)**

Last week, the after-game assessment was that, judging from their performance against Avoch, Carloway would have little difficulty competing with any island side; scoring against them would be the problem. Wow! The Carloway squad must have read that comment. Russ Lapsley must still be waking up in the middle of the night weeping after this nightmare. Despite being the safest of safe keepers when he had the chance, and recording some superlative stops, this experience must have left him a gibbering wreck. Clearly the planets were in alignment today, as sterling performances were displayed throughout the squad. Maybe "Laxay" should go on holiday more often!

The causes of the margin of victory need no explanation: pace; appetite for the ball; imaginative off-ball movement into the empty spaces; relentlessly moving forward;

the early ball; and so on. Any coach instils these qualities in his group and, of course, hopes for a general willingness to listen and learn. Today, with so many of the squad “*on message*” as it were, Barra were doomed and could not cover all the options available to the Blues.

It’s been an open secret that a reasonable team turn-out for na Gormaich eventually would demonstrate that the Blues possess these abilities; what, at times, has been missing is the capability of taking the chances that such skill creates, or passing on the chances to colleagues who have a better chance of doing so. No sign of that today. There was only one objective here in Benbecula: to get the ball into the opposition net as early and as often as possible, and bury the ghosts of 2015. The result: Carloway’s finest performance in a long, long while.

**Barra Man of the Match: James Davidson.**

**Carloway Man of the Match: Eachainn Miller.**