

Eilean an Fhraoich Cup Semi-Final First Leg:

Carloway 2 (1) Point 1 (1)

Angus Grant 1 min. 26 secs., 53 Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur (o.g.) 5

At Cnoc a' Choilich, Carloway.

Monday, 10.7.17, 19.00.

Referee: David "Spider" Macleod.

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

Far-side line judge: Neil Macritchie.

CARLOWAY: 4-5-1.

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

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

Gordon "Van Der Sar" Craigie

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

Callum "Beag" Mackay Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Dan Crossley Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald Gordon "Tago" Macdonald

Angus Grant

Subs. used: Andy Morrison (Athletic) (Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald) 64; Hamish Macdonald (United) (Gordon "Tago" Macdonald) 76; Andrew Macleod (Angus Grant) 88.

Sub. not used: Andrew "Lanky" Macdonald.

POINT: 4-4-2

Manager: Angus "Stoodie" Mackay.

Darren "Cage" Wilson (Lochs) Angus Macdonald

Matthew Campbell Donald "Spike" Smith Andrew Murray Alfie Macmillan

Daniel Macleod Iain "Macca" Mackenzie Alasdair Gillies (capt.) Scott Campbell

Ally Lamont

Subs. used: Kevin Flower (United) (Donald "Spike" Smith) 45; Sean "Bayble" Macleod (Darren "Cage" Wilson) 60; Andrew Mackay (Daniel Macleod) 75; Euan Macdonald (United) ("Alfie") 85.

Yellow cards: Andrew Murray 44; Sean "Bayble" Macleod 74.

An interesting tie was in prospect tonight between what appeared to be the island's two in-form teams, although the confrontation was diminished somewhat by the fact that this was the EaF. So, how much of the "real" Carloway and Point would be taking the field? In what was their only previous 2017 encounter Carloway had astonished Point by defeating them 2-0 in their League game at Garrabost on 19th May - courtesy of two Exocets from Andrew "Tago" Maciver that left "Gordie" Mackenzie clutching at thin air.

Of course, the Blues had spent most of that night unable to get out of their own half and it was fortuitous that the back four who had stood tall at Garrabost that evening were local boys and featured tonight. Unfortunately, David Beaton, Jordan Macleod, and the "Gochans" were ineligible for this tie, while absentees included Andrew "Tago" (attending weddings) and Kenny "Beag" Macleod. Fortunately, Gordon "Tago" Macdonald was available and started on the left, while Angus Grant was back on the island to lead the line.

Additional good news for na Gormaich was the absence of pain-in-the-neck,

Ally “Wally” Maciver, in an Arsenal strip, and also midfield *animateur*, Hugh Morrison, although major irritants, Andrew Murray and Angus Macdonald, were present in central and right midfield respectively to support Lochs' Darren “Cage” Wilson up front.

An added nuance to tonight's first leg worth considering was that the hosts were the present holders of the EaF Cup, winning it last year for the first time in its 84-year history, 4-2 versus Lochs, after falling at the final hurdle an incredible **SIX** times previously. Last season's triumph didn't come easy though. After seeing off Harris in Round 1, 3-0 away and 3-1 at home, Carloway went nap in the Semi-Final, thumping the Niseachs 4-2 at Fivepenny, then 5-2 at Cnoc a' Choilich, before being compelled to face perennial finalists Maroons - 15 times-winners in 27 final appearances - at Creagan Dubh, their home ground, of all places, in the Final. Nevertheless, last August, in near-Biblical conditions, the Blues waded through the gloom to a 1-0 half-time lead, thanks to a Grant opener, before surviving a Jim O'Donnell equalizer on the hour to storm into a 4-1 lead with goals from Graeme Mackenzie (o.g.), Eachainn Miller, and Kenny “Dokus” Macdonald, and staying strong despite Robert Mackenzie pulling one back just before the final whistle.

A clear, sunny evening, with no appreciable wind; a beautifully-cut pitch by George Spy: on a midsummer's evening, what more could you ask for? Against Lochs last Wednesday, Carloway had scored in 3 minutes 36 seconds. Tonight, they improved on that by over two minutes! After an initial skirmish in the centre circle, Mackay moved forward and fed “Dokus”, breaking left. He combined with “Tago” to propel the ball down the line to Grant, who carried the ball forward, checked, then cut in to his right towards the corner of the box. As Gillies closed, he whipped in a low right-footer, which seemed to deceive the unsighted Lamont and crept home to his left (**1-0**). Not quite rivalling Dan Crossley's 35-second opener at Barvas in April 2011, but they all count!

However, the explosive start was only half-over: in the fifth minute it was the Rubhachs' turn to surge forward through the middle and Murray managed to pick out Macdonald bursting forward on the right and cutting into the box. “Laxay” was on him and the two of them wrestled their way to the bye-line on Craigie's left where the wing-man managed to hold off his namesake and whip across a nasty, low, squared cross, 8 metres out. None of his teammates were close but “Tiger” wasn't to know that and was unfortunate enough to stick out his left foot to clear but only succeeded in whacking the ball into his own net, to “Van Der Sar's” right (**1-1**).

After 12 minutes the Blues had an opportunity to re-take the lead when “Dokus” won the ball on the centre line and lifted a glorious high breaker over the back-line for Grant to race clear and into the right of the Rubhach box. As Lamont approached, he chipped the neatest of lobs over his head but, unfortunately, it drifted a metre wide of the far post. Two minutes later yet another chance went begging, when a flowing move saw Crossley rocket off on a trademark run from just inside his own half to the right edge of the Point

box, before laying off the ball inwards to Grant, who helped it on under pressure to his left to the unmarked "Tago", 16 metres from goal. However, his measured lob landed on top of the centre of the net.

It was 36 minutes before the next "real" opening appeared when Mackay managed to win the ball midway within the Rudhach half, 10 metres in from the right touch-line. He then fired over a high diagonal which was touched on by Crossley outside the near-side of the box, and Grant reacted first by slipping inside "Macca" to send in an instant low drive but it whizzed a metre outside the near post.

Moments later na Gormaich almost lived to regret their profligacy when a raft of chances came Point's way. Murray, just inside the centre of his won half, tried to find Macdonald coming in on the right. He was intercepted by "Laxay" but his attempted clearance ricocheted back off the striker, wrong-footing the covering Armstrong, and the Point man ran through unhindered. Craigie was out like a flash but as he dived at the Point man's feet, Macdonald slipped the ball neatly to his right and watched it trundle slowly towards goal from 16 metres. However, the chasing Armstrong managed to catch the ball a couple of metres from the line and boot it away for a corner. The corner came over mid-high, ping-ponged back and forth off the ruck and broke to Daniel Macleod, but 8 metres out in front of goal, he mishit and the ball rebounded straight out to no. 12 just inside the centre of the box, but he in turn miscued his immediate shot into the ground and it trickled harmlessly past Carloway's left-hand post.

In 42 minutes the final chance of the half saw a "Dokus" free-kick, midway within the Rubhach half, on the Carloway left touch-line, come in high in the centre and eventually reach "D.I.", who flicked it onwards, but Matthew Campbell managed to block it inside his left-hand post, and boot it clear.

Half-time: Carloway 1 Point 1

The first half had featured the now traditional scorching opening from the Blues, though it had been somewhat stymied by the unfortunate piece of bad luck at the other end. Thereafter, the assault had largely petered out, lacking the midfield powerhouse of "Pongo" to keep the drive on-message and the absences of Billy Anderson and Eachainn Miller loading all the requirements of creative imagination - and explosive pace - on the shoulders of Dan Crossley. Even though he had the more measured support of "Dokus", the combative aggression of Murray, "Spike", and Macdonald had to be countered also and, apart from the raft of chances for either side appearing just after the half-hour, the lack of fluency and cohesive movement which frequently manifest itself in EaF ties because of unfamiliar line-ups and strategies became more and more apparent.

However, this fragile equilibrium was swiftly shattered after the restart. In 53 minutes "Laxay" broke up a Rudhach attack just outside the centre of the Carloway box. Seeing an opening, he veered off leftwards on one of his regular dribbling runs which took him past a couple of half-tackles, rode his

luck through another two, lost the ball, won it back, and found himself eventually on the Blues' left touch-line, midway within the Point half. A swift interplay forward and back with "Tago" saw him check, then check back again, then a third time, before looking up and delivering a high right-footer swinging diagonally into the opposition box. Grant saw it coming and ghosted in behind the back, to the right of Gillies, and with the ball too far out for Lamont to race to cut out, met the ball perfectly a couple of metres inside the near side of the box to head the ball firmly over the approaching keeper and high into the right of his net (2-1). Beautifully struck and taken!

Five minutes later it was nearly three, when "Dokus", about to take a free-kick in the centre, midway within the Rubhach half, spotted the ace striker lurking on the edge of the box, to Lamont's left. He immediately stabbed the ball early and low to the right of the wall for Grant to react immediately and blast a searing right-footer against the left junction of bar and post and past.

Na Gormaich continued to press and in 61 minutes tenacious play by Callum "Beag" down the right took him past two defenders to supply Grant, moving into the near corner of the box. The ball ran ahead of him, broke back to him, and from 14 metres he sent in a low, vicious drive which Lamont did well to smother low, by his left-hand post.

Moments later, the visitors' Macdonald, now switched to the left, was sent clear behind "Tiger" but as the back closed, 16 metres from the bye-line he whipped across a fierce, squared pass which the arriving Sean "Bayble" did well to meet, but its pace made it too difficult to control, and his first-time right-foot connect sliced away to the right. Ten minutes later, a Point corner from their right was headed on by "D.I." and cleared outwards to the Carloway left where Macmillan seized on it, made the bye-line, then delivered an inviting high cross into the box. Again, Sean "Bayble" saw it coming but couldn't get the angle right on his header and the effort whizzed a metre wide of Craigie's left-hand post.

The pace of the game was markedly slowing as if both sides were subconsciously remembering that a close score left options open - for both - next week at Garrabost in the second leg and it was the 80th minute before the Blues threatened again. Crossley trickery on the left, *à la* Wiltord twisting and turning, allowed him to make midway within the Rudhach half and slot a perfect ball low through to Grant, turning to his right into the box, but Lamont got down well to touch his low right-foot drive past the far post. Three minutes later the final opportunity of the game arrived when Campbell raced down the left touch-line, then, midway within the Blues' half, he played a low diagonal into "Bayble", 20 metres from goal in the centre, but his first-time right-footer flew a metre wide of "Van Der Sar's" left-hand post.

Full-time: Carloway 2 (1) Point 1 (1)

So, half-time in this Semi-Final and still everything to play for. Any advantage is welcome, especially when a visit to Garrabost is next up. However, knowing that it will not be the full-strength Point that is to be faced does help, even

though the same applies to the Blues. In truth, there was little between the sides tonight, two moments of opportunism outweighing a piece of bad luck/good luck (depending on who you support). What made a difference tonight for na Gormaich was the lack of options in midfield and wide up front, so that even though the back-line were their usual adamantine selves, and Angus Grant looked really up-for-it at the other end, the middle of the field was short of weight and didn't cohere fluently, facing constant aggression from Murray and Macdonald. This central conflict affected both sides' overall performances, of course, hence the dearth of opportunities at both ends and a low burner of a contest.

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

Point Man of the Match: Angus Macdonald.