

Eilean an Fhraoich Cup Semi-Final Second Leg:

Point 2 (2) Carloway 5 (2). Aggregate: **Point 3 Carloway 7**

*Andrew Murray 7 Angus Grant 1 min. 5 secs., 37, 71
Matthew Wright 21 Dan Crossley 67, 83*

At Garrabost, Point.

Monday, 17.7.17, 19.00.

Referee: Derek Nicolson.

Stand-side line judge: Neil Macritchie.

Far-side line judge: Grant Hunter.

CARLOWAY: 4-5-1.

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

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

Jack MacIennan (United)

*Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Ali "Laxay" Macdonald Joe Armstrong
Callum "Beag" Mackay Stuart "Bubble" Macdonald (Athletic) Andrew "Tago" Maciver Dan
Crossley Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald*

Angus Grant

*Subs. used: Gordon "Tago" Macdonald (Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald) 74; Ben Smith (Stuart "Bubble"
Macdonald) 78; Hamish Macdonald (United) (Angus Grant) 86; Kevin "Barra" Macneil (Callum "Beag"
Mackay) 88.*

Sub. not used: Gordon "Van Der Sar" Craigie.

POINT: 4-4-2

Manager: Angus "Stoodie" Mackay.

Matthew Wright Domhnall Alex Morrison

Kevin Flower Andrew Murray Ali "Wally" Maciver Angus Macdonald

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

Ally Lamont

*Subs. used: Andrew Mackay (Iain "Macca" Mackenzie) 71; Sean "Bayble" Macleod (Domhnall Alex
Morrison) 73; Donald "Spike" Smith (Andrew Murray) 82; Euan Macdonald (Matthew Wright) 85.*

Subs. not used:

Yellow cards: Scott Campbell 84; Sean "Bayble" Campbell 90+2.

Any tourist crossing the Braighe tonight must have thought they were entering the gates of Heaven. Looking southwards, a cloudless sky shed golden sunlight over the incoming waves and the visitor might gaze towards Holm Point and pier, then on down the east coast of Lewis, past Grimshader, Ranais, and as far as the Shiants. However, it's unlikely the Carloway squad gave much consideration to the beauty of their surroundings, their immediate concern more likely to be the prospect of denying a large group of intimidating young men wearing red and white at one of the Blues' least favourite grounds.

Six straight wins in League and Cup, ten wins in twelve games since the opening of May must have inspired confidence, but still there is always an uneasy feeling heading east to take on the Rudhachs in their own den. Last week's first leg had been an even contest, mostly fought out in the centre remorselessly by Domhnall Mackay, Dan Crossley, Andrew Murray, and Angus Macdonald, and only distinguished by two priceless pieces of skilful opportunism from Angus Grant, which cancelled out a moment of bad luck at the other end. So, all to play for, for both

sides: "*whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap*". And, of course, there was the earlier 2-0 League victory here to re-assure them that optimism over tonight's outcome was not misplaced, assuming they glossed over the excessive pressure they were under for a large part of that game, and simply referred back to the two spectacular efforts from midfield dynamo, Andrew "Tago" Maciver.

This being the EaF Cup, certain changes were obligatory: Jordan Macleod and Sven Wiltshire were ineligible, but United's Jack Maclennan and Hamish Macdonald were available, the former taking over from Gordon "Van Der Sar", who dropped to the bench, alongside Hamish, Gordon "Tago" Macdonald, Ben Smith, and returning favourite, Kevin "Barra" Macneil, for his first appearance of the season. Callum "Beag" Mackay now moved right, Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald left, and Athletic's Stuart "Bubble" Macdonald made a welcome return in the centre beside "Pongo" and Dan Crossley. An added touch of gloom was the sight of perennial pain-in-the-posterior, Ali "Wally" Maciver, in the centre of the opposition ranks, forming a threatening triumvirate with Andrew Murray and Angus Macdonald.

With the setting sun and a steady east-sou' easterly behind them, the home side enjoyed a first-half advantage and almost capitalized in the opening seconds with what might have been the fastest goal of the season. An initial ball through the Carloway centre saw Ali "Laxay" Macdonald get into an uncharacteristic fankle on the edge of the box, leave his knock-back far too short, and allow "Wally" to burst past him on to it. Nevertheless, Maclennan anticipated the danger and raced out to block Maciver's slip from 16 metres to his right.

However, the *aficionados* were not be denied the customary explosive start they had become used to in Blues' ties. Broken play resulted in the ball eventually being played back to Maclennan and he cleared high downfield. The ball came through on the left into the Point half. A subtle nudge by Grant allowed him to win a tussle for the ball with his marker Scott Campbell and race forward unhindered into the left of the home box. As Lamont came out, the young hit-man coolly slipped the ball to the helpless keeper's left and it rolled home just inside the far post (**0-1**). 65 seconds! Slipping up, Angus - Jordan did it in 24!

Unfortunately the early lead only lasted another 6 minutes, until Murray gathered the ball inside the centre circle in the Carloway half. He moved forwards leftwards, played a quick one-two with Macdonald to his left, then cut in diagonally rightwards towards goal. As the Blues' back-line backed off alarmingly from him, he had time to look up, then deliver a beautifully-flighted right-footer high to Maclennan's left from 20 metres and just inside his top left-hand corner (**1-1**).

Na Gormaich retaliated on the quarter-hour when Grant robbed Gillies, 20 metres out in front of goal. He played the ball swiftly to Crossley on his right and he in turn made the bye-line to cut back an inch-perfect low cross to Mackay coming forward, 22 metres out on the left edge of the box, but his lob was off-cue and flew back across goal and wide. Two minutes later another push ended with a Callum "Beag" corner from the Carloway right being met by Crossley, 10 metres out at the near post, but his bullet header shot inches over the junction of bar and post.

On 21 minutes, however, the Blues suddenly had some serious thinking to do, as

Point drew level on aggregate. Macdonald won the ball just inside the centre circle within his own half, and, as always, came steaming forward like a juggernaut. He played the ball forward right, and his wing-man made the right corner of the box, before slipping the ball square left, under pressure. Domhnall Alex Morrison and “Laxay” vied for the ball, it broke on from them to the left to reach Matthew Wright, totally unmarked, 16 metres out in front of goal. Maclennan immediately rushed out but had no chance as the young striker slipped the ball under him to his left (2-1).

Six minutes later the situation almost got considerably worse, when Wright’s cross from the left touch-line, 16 metres from the bye-line, was met by Morrison at the far post, 6 metres from goal, but he somehow managed to nod the ball a foot outside Maclennan’s left-hand post.

The Rudhachs, at this stage, were edging midfield: although Murray was lying deep, he was as combative as he was creative, and with Crossley and “Tago” also tending to sit just in front of their back-line, the centre was ripe for an unmarked Macdonald to hustle his way forward *à la* Günter Netzer at every opportunity and organize the attacks.

Yet the chances still came for the Blues to climb back into the game. In 29 minutes a “Dokus” free-kick from midway within the Point half, out on the Carloway left touch-line, came in high in the centre, only for an unmarked Mackay to head a foot over the central bar. Finally, in 37 minutes, the Blues drew level on the night. A Callum “Beag” short corner on the Blues’ right saw the young star send a head-high diagonal across the face of the Rudhach goal. It reached Grant, 6 metres out by the far post, and the hit-man reacted brilliantly to head the ball down hard to Lamont’s left (2-2).

Two minutes later na Gormaich might have killed the tie stone-dead when “Dokus” broke down the left touch-line, checked 22 metres from the bye-line, and swept in a high diagonal which brushed off challenging heads, before reaching “Tago”, 20 metres out in the centre, but his first-time connect was last seen passing Arnish Point.

Half-time: Point 2 Carloway 2

Their profligacy in front of goal must have haunted the boys in blue in the half-time dressing room, although they must have been equally happy that Point had passed up one or two gilt-edged opportunities also. Apart from lack of sharpness in front of goal, the only real problem had been an inability to put the hems on Angus Macdonald, partly due to the deep nature of the Carloway midfield. The strengths had been Carloway’s pace, Crossley through the centre, Callum “Beag” on the right, and Angus Grant up front. Hopefully, the latter would continue. However, immediately they showed they were still playing according to *“Zen and the Art of Seeing How Nearly You Can Miss”*.

In 48 minutes a Carloway drive broke down on the right edge of the Point box, but a determined Grant won the ball back on the bye-line. He then cut in along the line and slipped the ball across to Callum “Beag” waiting in the centre, but as Lamont rushed out to block, the wing-man ultra-carefully side-footed the ball to the keeper’s left from 10 metres, hit the outside of the post, and the ball was cleared. The ball

was punted downfield, and Macdonald on the centre circle managed to knock it on between “Tiger” and “Laxay” for Wright to race into the left of the box unhindered. However, Maclennan was out like a flash to block his attempted slip to his right from 12 metres.

In 57 minutes Grant was sent free down the Rudhach left after a breaking Crossley rode two tackles, made the centre circle, then stroked an exquisite Charlie Gallagher inside the back, but from 14 metres Lamont did well to block for a corner. The earth was now definitely shifting in Carloway’s favour despite a “Wally” free-kick from midway within the Blues’ half on the left finding Campbell’s head, 12 metres out by the far post, but the attempt went into the near side-netting.

Na Gormaich seemed to be abandoning their trademark passing-style out of defence to set up attacks fast and using the old Athletic-style of long ball to allow Callum “Beag” to get free on the right, or, more usually, to send Grant behind the line.

On the hour Mackay, just inside his own half, lifted another high ball over “Macca” and Gillies for Grant to race towards Lamont but from 20 metres in the centre he fired a metre over the bar. In 66 minutes a one-two between Grant and Crossley allowed the centre-forward to make the right-hand corner of the box but Lamont read him and got down well to his left to push away for a corner.

However, Callum “Beag’s” low corner came across low 10 metres out, ricocheted off one or two of the ruck, then reached Crossley towards Lamont’s right, his back to goal. As the ball passed him, the *trequartista* reached out leisurely with his right foot and with the most nonchalant of flicks, hooked the ball backwards past his right side and into the net (2-3). Talk about cool? Wow!

The tie was now surely safe but to rub it in, a fourth goal arrived four minutes later. An almighty kick-out by Maclennan came bouncing into the left of the Rubhach half and Gillies and Campbell tried to snuff out the threat from Grant between them, but the hit-man tussled with them and the ball broke behind them and inwards and suddenly he was clear through. He made the centre of the Point box and as Lamont approached, he sent a delicate lob gently over the stranded keeper and home (2-4). No, he didn’t look at “Raymondo” as if to say, “*I can be cool too!*”

A protracted deluge of substitutes for both sides now indicated starkly both management’s recognition that the contest was over, though the home side still came forward aggressively, in the hope of putting a more respectable score-line in the record books. Carloway were now in exhibition mode and unexpectedly piled more agony on their suffering hosts in the 83rd minute. A free-kick was awarded 20 metres from the bye-line, out on the Carloway left touch-line, and Crossley sent a glorious right-footer curling high across goal and just inside Lamont’s top-left-hand corner (2-5).

An absolute effortless peach to round off the night. Or so it seemed, yet the pain could have been even worse for the Point men as in added-on time substitutes Gordon “Tago” and “Barra” combined in the centre just outside the box, and enabled “Barra” to break inwards into the box. Despite heavy pressure, he managed to stab the ball past Lamont to the keeper’s right but the ball rolled on to strike the far post

and bounce clear.

Full-time: Point 2 (2) Carloway 5 (2). Aggregate: Point 3 Carloway 7

It's a strange game, football. Anyone at home, seeing this result flash up, would assume that Carloway had absolutely dominated this game and had strolled to victory. Yet until midway through the second half, the contest was still evenly balanced, although it was clearly drifting away from the home side in the second half.

The Blues had the best possible start to the game, then had seen Point steal the initiative, although na Gormaich still managed to create - and miss - Grade 1 opportunities, which would have secured the tie much earlier. That they did re-establish an edge over the Rudhachs in the second half seemed to be at the price of largely abandoning their traditional approach - the careful build-up, followed by a defence-splitting diagonal, etc. - and adopting the teachings contained in "*The Sam Allardyce Textbook on How to Win Games*", harnessing the pace of Crossley, Callum "Beag", and Grant to test the line repeatedly. The Graham Taylor/Wimbledon approach might not suit the purists, but it certainly was effective against a back-line slow on the turn and susceptible to attack at speed.

Whether or not it should be employed against the likes of Westside in the massive League confrontation on Friday is debatable. Certainly, having quality opponents like Innes Iain Morrison, Luke Mackay, Martainn Shields, and Scott Graham to cope with might interfere with such a plan. "Murchadh" was on a spying mission in the crowd tonight and, no doubt, took extensive notes. His main concern will be how to contain the creativity of Crossley, the pace of Callum "Beag" and Jordan Macleod on the wings, and the instinctive opportunism of Angus Grant.

Point Man of the Match: Angus Macdonald.

Carloway Man of the Match: Angus Grant.