

Moldova Lewis Cup Round 1:

Stornoway Athletic 2 (1) Carloway 1 (0)

Colin "Titch" Macritchie 16 Fraser "Frazmac" Macleod 72
Connor MacIver (pen.) 90+2

At Goathill Park, Stornoway.

Monday, 24.7.17, 7.15 p.m.

Referee: Stuart Macleod (Shawbost)..

Athletic line judge: Magnus Johnson.

Carloway line judge: Calum "Cobby" Macleod..

CARLOWAY: 4-5-1.

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

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

David Beaton

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

Jordan Macleod Andrew "Tago" Maciver Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Dan Crossley Kenny
"Dokus" Macdonald

Angus Grant

Subs. used: Fraser "Frazmac" Macleod (Jordan Macleod) 68; Callum "Beag" Mackay (Angus
Grant) 89.

Subs. not used: Gordon "Van Der Sar" Craigie; Ben Smith; Sven Wiltshire.

Yellow card: Donald "D.I." MacIennan 56.

Red card: Donald "D.I." MacIennan 64.

ATHLETIC: 4-5-1

Manager: Colin "Titch" Macritchie.

Mo Khalil 

Jamie Fraser Colin "Titch" Macritchie Scott "Flapjack" Macaulay  Stuart MacDonald 
Paul Macphail

Sean "Bayble" Macleod Ali "Koch" Morrison Lewis MacDonald  Calum Masson 
Murdo "Marags" Maciver

Sub. used: Connor Maciver.

Subs. not used: Craig Macleod.

Yellow cards: Scott "Flapjack" Macaulay 59; Mo Khalil 62; Lewis MacDonald 67; Stuart
MacDonald 78; Calum Masson 90+4.

Any euphoria still lingering around the Carloway dressing room after Friday night's massive derby victory over the Siarachs soon dissipated when it was recalled that tonight's opponents were the last island team to deny the Blues victory. In the sides' only previous meeting this season, at the end of May, na Gormaich overcame an early set-back to lead 2-1 at half-time, thanks to an Andrew "Tago" Maciver header and a perfect lob-shot from Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald. However, complacency then set in and an aggressive Athletic stormed back into the lead with 20 minutes to go and it took another "Tago" header to save a point for the home side, right on the final whistle. The following Saturday was the Avoch defeat and since then Carloway have enjoyed 8 straight victories, inspiring hope in the faithful that a trophy or trophies is/are within reach this season.

Last season, the clubs only met in their two League games, but these

provided something of a goalfest: in early June, Dan Crossley (2), Archie "Statto" MacDonald (2), Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald, and Donald "D.I." Maclellan all featured in a thumping 6-3 win, but then a much closer affair at Goathill in August, saw the Blues edge victory in a nine-goal thriller. Na Gormaich had roared into a 4-0 lead by the 51st minute, thanks to "D.I.", "Statto"(2), and Jake Allan; then, thinking the tie was more or less settled, the Blues had adopted the Ranieri approach, withdrawing crucial defensive lynchpin, Ali "Laxay" Macdonald, without clarifying strategies for the remainder of the game. Athletic grabbed two quick goals; "Tago" then got a fifth, but the Stornoway men then got two more, and the last quarter of the game developed into an almighty heave-ho, but the Blues held for the three points.

No doubt Carloway hoped for a little less drama tonight, given their upcoming League game-in-hand versus Ness on Friday. A few tweaks to Friday's lineup saw David Beaton return in goal, with Gordon "Van Der Sar" Craigie dropping to the bench, while Jordan Macleod was given the nod over Callum "Beag" Mackay on the right, who also started in the bull-pen beside Sven Wiltshire, replacing the absent Gordon "Tago" Macdonald, Fraser "Frazmac" Macleod and Ben Smith.

As is usual at Goathill, the sparse crowd seemed to be composed entirely of Blues' diehards, no doubt, hopeful of a repeat of Friday night's heroics, but the opening 45 minutes must have left them sorely disappointed. A pleasant enough evening was marred slightly by a rapid falling-off in temperature from the hot afternoon but the pitch itself was dry, though bumpy, with the slightest of overcasts dimming the setting sun and making attack marginally easier for the home side.

Athletic, mindful of Carloway's present form, had clearly opted for heavy marking, badgering, and relentless pursuit, but the Blues still opened promisingly, with early pressure leading to a succession of threatening corners. In 9 minutes a Macleod corner on the Carloway right was headed on in the centre and reached "Dokus" on the far touch-line. He doubled back and from midway within the Aths' half thumped across an inviting in-swinger which dipped across the face of goal, 12 metres out, but it was just out of reach of the charging "D.I." and "Raymondo".

However, with no return, the Blues suddenly seemed to lose their way, as if someone somewhere had erased the hard disc and no one could find the OS to re-install the system. A group decision to switch systems and revert to their previously usual method of building from the back and playing themselves forward, in true *totalvoetbal* style, rather than the long-ball method to pick out Macleod, Grant, and Crossley which bore fruit against Westside, almost led to disaster several times in the next twenty minutes.

A persistent Athletic saw Khalil block Mackay, lingering on the ball 20 metres from goal, and the ball spun forward towards Macphail bursting into the box, but "Laxay" himself recovered in time, to race back and block him. Then three minutes later "Laxay" himself delayed his forward pass and Macphail managed to block the ball outwards towards Fraser but as he tried to cut in

square, 16 metres from goal, "D.I." booted the ball away from his feet.

However, a minute later Aths took an unexpected lead. Masson won the ball in front of "Dokus" within his own half on the right and transferred it forward to "Bubble" breaking into the Carloway half, who then found Macphail moving inwards. He in turn sent the ball square to "Titch" in the centre and he stabbed a left-footer high over the line from 24 metres and the flight of his lob-shot carried it over Beaton to drop under the bar in the centre for the opener (**1-0**).

As na Gormaich struggled to settle and establish momentum, their defence did regain its equilibrium, but chances were few. In 22 minutes a break on the right allowed "Tiger" to supply Macleod on the touch-line, who then turned in to find Crossley, who transferred the ball onwards to "Tago", but his instant right-foot strike, 22 metres from goal in the centre, did not bend enough to take it inside "Marags" right-hand post.

In 34 minutes Mackay played the ball to Crossley in the centre circle and "Raymondo" steamed off on a typical trademark run which took him rightwards past a couple of opponents, then leftwards past another but his parting left-foot daisy-cutter lacked power and went straight to the keeper. Three minutes later a mighty "D.I." free-kick from the centre circle was headed on by "Tago" on the edge of the box but was a couple of feet too high for Grant to meet, 12 metres from the line in front of goal. And then, on the stroke of half-time, the Blues had a golden opportunity to conclude a dismal opening period and go in level at the interval. Armstrong once more got the ball forward to "Dokus", who made halfway down the line to midway within the Athletic half before delivering an exquisite high breaker towards the near post, which Grant controlled beautifully, ghosting to the right of "Koch", 14 metres from the bye-line, by the post. However, his attempt at an instant left-foot conversion was lifted a metre over "Marags" right-hand bar.

Half-time: Stornoway Athletic 1 Carloway 0

A dismal first-half had presented a Blues' side, totally unrecognizable to the outfit that had triumphed in the League stand-off last Friday. Which ones were the real na Gormaich? Yet it was difficult to pinpoint what exactly was wrong. No one was posted missing; everyone was trying hard, and in face of a determined Aths' side, 100% committed. But the coherence and fluency was missing, as if the oil had been drained from the sump.

Immediately, it was almost two for the home side. An Athletic corner was half-cleared and as "D.I." moved to clear, on the right edge of the Carloway box, "Flapjack" robbed him and flashed a wicked low drive just outside Beaton's right-hand post.

Two minutes later Carloway almost got an opener when Mackay won the ball within his own half and supplied "Dokus" on the left centre-line. The wing-man made ground, before doing his characteristic check-back and delivering the sweetest of Martin Peters to the far post, where Mackay, who had carried on forward, met it 14 metres from goal to send in a crashing drive, but "Marags"

reacted brilliantly to block high to his right and away. Five minutes later a "Dokus" corner on the left was met by "D.I.", 8 metres out in the centre, but his rocket of a header whizzed a foot outside the near post.

Finally, Carloway seemed to be re-discovering their mojo, and, perhaps simply by force of effort, were coming forward at pace, with more cohesion. In 56 minutes Crossley, supplied by "Laxay", came charging through the centre and Grant timed his run perfectly on the left to leave Masson behind but his sharp head-high cross from the left bye-line found no takers. Then, a minute later, yet another golden opportunity for the Blues ended in sadness. While everyone was arguing about the award of a Carloway free-kick in the centre, 10 metres into the Athletic half, Crossley stabbed the ball forward to "Dokus" totally unmarked on the left, midway within the Hoops' half. The wing-man did not hesitate and raced down the left and into the box before sending a glorious bending right-footer spinning across the Athletic back-line. Grant came in unmarked at the far post but the young striker miscued attempting to slide the ball home, stumbled over the ball to the ground and "Marags" rushed out gratefully to pick up.

An even better opportunity arrived two minutes later when a high "D.I." clearance sent Macleod free down the right. Eighteen metres from the line on the right touch-line, he sent in an inviting cross for Grant, rushing to meet it by the near post, 12 metres from goal. However, the marking "Flapjack", following him, earned himself a yellow for bundling him off the ball. Nevertheless, "Marags" read Mackay's penalty perfectly to get down fast to his right to block the captain's powerful strike.

Five minutes later a new chapter was written with the loss of defensive rock, "D.I." for his second heavy tackle of the night on the elusive Fraser, just inside his own half on the left. Naturally, the Blues were immediately unsettled and they were still struggling to recalibrate the machine as an Athletic corner on their left cleared the centre. "Flapjack" chased it and his return square cross from the right corner flag found "Bayble" in the centre but his header hit the top of the bar and went over.

"Windy" now decided to roll the dice, and "Frazmac" replaced Macleod and almost made the score-sheet right away when a "Laxay" free-kick in the centre circle reached him 16 metres from goal but he was unable to direct his header properly and the keeper was untroubled.

The final 20 minutes witnessed frenetic action in the Hoops' box. In 71 minutes "Tago" and Crossley combined in the centre to send the latter moving rightwards into the box, then to cut the ball to his left across goal. Mackay half-connected with the ball as it passed him, 10 metres out, but "Marags" saw it coming and somehow managed to get his right hand to the ball as it passed him and touched it on to the inside of his right-hand post and away.

A moment later the equalizer finally arrived, when a "Dokus" corner from the left was headed on outwards to the Carloway right. "Tiger", 24 metres from goal on the right and 10 metres in from the touch-line, fired the ball straight

back in. Within the congested box, the ball hit off “Titch” to his left towards “Frazmac” who slid forward instantly to whack the ball against the underside of the bar and when it came down, bundle it over the line. (1-1).

Athletic tried to reply immediately when the persistent Fraser played a one-two with “Titch”, then raced down the left. He then cut in behind Mackay, 16 metres from the bye-line, and toe-poked a right-footer to Beaton’s left across the face of the goal - but a couple of metres outside the far post. Five minutes later Athletic went close one more time when a “Bubble” free-kick from just inside the Carloway half to the right was met by “Flapjack” on the left, 12 metres from the line, but Beaton held at full stretch, high to his left.

At the other end, in 81 minutes a Crossley free-kick from the centre circle was met by “Tago” on the penalty spot, but his header soared well over. Then, deep in added-on time, the ding-dong affair was settled. A Maciver pass down the right found the mercurial Khalil moving rightwards to the line to cross when “Laxay” was adjudged to have brought him down. Connor Maciver took the penalty, driving straight down the middle, with Beaton already having gone right (2-1).

However, with virtually the last attack of the game a “Dokus” free-kick came in high from the left centre line and “Frazmac” judged his run and jump perfectly to meet it on the penalty spot but his header crashed back off the right side of the Hoops’ bar. That more or less summed up Carloway’s night.

Full-time: Stornoway Athletic 2 (1) Carloway 1 (0)

Defeat itself is not always the hardest thing to endure. It’s the manner of the defeat itself. Even Man. Utd or Barca don’t win them all, but the nature of a defeat can be dispiriting. Carloway did admirably, in recovering from a dire first-half performance to give it everything in the second, but the machine never really reached the standard of fluency and creativity that has been apparent in the last few games.

Lady Luck also played a significant part in the proceedings tonight, and a very competent opposing goalkeeper. Hopefully this set-back was a only a hiccup, but, of course, difficulties have appeared, and will continue to appear, in the run-in to the League finale, and important cup-ties. The central defensive partnership, so fundamental to Blues’ success, is under threat: “D.I.” may face suspension, while “Laxay” received a bad facial injury. Also, ace goal-scorer, Angus Grant, may not be around for all the final games.

On another evening, the second half display might have produced several goals. As it was, the ball simply would not run for the Blues, as it would not for the Siarachs last Friday: a missed penalty; a key player dismissed; the bar struck in the final minute; a great save touched on to the inside of the post, etc.

Stornoway Athletic Man of the Match: Murdo “Marags” Maciver.

Carloway Man of the Match: Ali “Laxay” Macdonald.

