

Eilean an Fhraoich Cup Final:

Carloway 5 (1) Ness 0 (0)

Stuart "Bubble" Macdonald 24

Own Goal 49

Domhnall Mackay 56

Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald 59

Gordon "Tago" Macdonald (pen.) 85

At Garrabost, Point.

Friday, 11.8.17, 19.00

Referee: Stuart Macleod.

Standside line judge: Calum "Chancey" Macleod.

Nearside line judge: Neil Macritchie.

CARLOWAY: 4-5-1.

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

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

Jack Maclennan (United)

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

Dan Crossley Stuart "Bubble" Macdonald (Athletic) Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Andrew "Tago" Maciver Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald

Angus Grant

Subs. used: Gordon "Tago" Macdonald (Stuart "Bubble" Macdonald) 77; Callum "Beag" Mackay (Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald) 86; Hamish Macdonald (United) (Angus Grant) 86; Euan Gilmour (Joe Armstrong) 88.

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

NESS: 4-5-1

Manager: Chris Macdonald

Colin Morrison

James "Titch" Morrison Innes Smith James "Jambo" Morrison Robin Bell Micheil Russell-Smith

Jack McCarroll Neil Morrison (capt.) Jack Dunlop Donald Gillies Ali Murray

Subs. Used: Calum Vann (Jack McCarroll) 54; Murdo "Mojo" Maclean () 58; Scott Macrury (Donald Gillies) 82)

Yellow cards: James "Jambo" Morrison 30; Micheil Russell-Smith 85

After the champagne celebrations on Monday, it was a shock to realise that the Champions' season was not yet over, and that one or two small matters, like an EaF Final and Coop Cup Semi-Final, still had to be played. There was a time, only 6-7 years ago, when any final would have been **THE** event in the Blues' calendar. Sir Alec Ferguson once said that his greatest achievement as a manager with St. Mirren, Aberdeen, and Man.Utd, was creating "a winning mentality". With the Dons, for instance, he said he managed to get them "used" to playing at Hampden, appearing in Cup Finals, etc. The continuing legacy of Peter "Dokus" Macdonald, Kevin Anderson, and Graeme "Windy" Miller has been to establish this outlook at the club, making appearances in Finals commonplace in any season, and elevating tonight's fixture to (almost) the same level of importance as Monday's. The League and ABC have been won twice; the others once, with the HAC the only one to

get away.

Apart from actually winning, a new bridge had to be crossed at Garrabost this evening: retaining a trophy. If last year's maiden EaF triumph at Creagan Dubh was repeated this evening, another first would be achieved. Hopefully the manner in which last year's victory had been achieved would also be on display: a stirring opening half-hour had seen Angus Grant give the Blues a half-time lead, before Lochs fought back to equalise through Jim O'Donnell. The home side immediately fell behind again to a Graeme Mackenzie own goal, and the final half-hour had seen na Gormaich edge a ferocious slugging match, with further strikes by Eachainn Miller and Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald giving Carloway a 4-2 success.

At least tonight they did not have to face the Niseachs at Fivepenny and probably entered tonight's fray reasonably confidently. In mid-July, in Ness, they had coasted along complacently until Jack Dunlop had delivered a nasty shock in 38 minutes, but thereafter they had found their feet, their cohesion and pace, and had run riot, scoring five times in 13 minutes and running out eventual winners, 6-2.

In the reverse fixture at Cnoc a' Choilich, a 4-1 win for the Blues, the captain had scored early; Ness then dominated play but failed to threaten, Craigie saved a penalty, and then an Angus Grant double put the game beyond the visitors. Looking back through the 84-year history of the EaF, it's surprising that the two teams have only met once before in the final, 60 years ago at Goathill, in 1957, when Ness won 3-1. Even more surprising is the fact that two of the Blues' squad that night were current diehards, Norman "Brot" Macarthur and Donald R. "D.R." Macleod.

Anyway, to tonight. Only three of last year's heroes missed tonight: John "Uig" Morrison (Lochs), Eachainn Miller (now with Stirling Uni.), and Kevin "Barra" Macneil, though Dan Crossley and "Dokus" switched wings tonight. However, Andrew "Tago" Maciver, who started on the bench last year, filled the gap in midfield, with Athletic's, Stuart "Bubble" Macdonald. Fans' favourite and dead-ball expert, Gordon "Tago" Macdonald, also made a welcome re-appearance in the bull-pen. However, there was no place for the towering figure of Donald "Sweeney" Macsween in the Niseach goal, although there was at least one surprise from Ness: a figure on the bench almost as old as "Sweeney", though slightly fitter perhaps: ex-Aths star, M.J. "Mojo" Maclean.

Fortunately, one aspect of last year's Final was not repeated: the near-Biblical conditions that engulfed the second-half in Leurbost. Tonight light cloud and a moderate sou'easterly provided pleasant conditions on a beautifully-cut pitch. No doubt anxious not to repeat Monday's sluggish first half performance versus Point, Carloway immediately seized the initiative and came at Ness briskly from the whistle. As they pushed the battle-front 10 metres into the Niseach half, an initial surprise was the deployment of premier *agent provocateur*, Micheil Russell-Smith, on the right, setting a test for Joe Armstrong, with James "Titch" Morrison on the left.

Carloway's first half-chance came in 7 minutes when "Bubble" supplied "Dokus" wide on the left and he immediately steamed forward down the line. Twenty metres from the bye-line, he performed his characteristic check, then turn inwards across his marker, but his low right-footer from the corner of the box went straight to the keeper. Five minutes later a high Morrison clearance from his box was met on the volley in the centre-circle by "D.I.", who sent it whizzing straight back towards Grant, on the edge of the box. The young star tried to turn right off Morrison, stumbled, then managed to push the ball square to "Bubble", but the keeper got across smartly to block. The ball rebounded out upwards but Grant, following up, was off-balance when he got his head to it and the ball flew well-wide of the Niseach right-hand post.

Russell-Smith's elusive unpredictability eventually bore results in the 16th minute when he dummied Armstrong on the centre-line and turned inwards, diagonally forward into the Blues' half, only to be unceremoniously dumped by Mackay. Russell-Smith took the free-kick himself, 22 metres from goal, but his right-footer only succeeded in flattening "Laxay". Two minutes later the Niseachs went much closer: a corner on their right landed just in front of Maclennan but as the keeper came for it "D.I." knocked it outwards. A scramble of half-hit shots, blocks, ricochets, and half-clearances followed before Armstrong managed to boot the ball into Broad Bay.

Ness almost regretted this missed opportunity within the minute, as "Tago", in the centre circle, slipped a perfect diagonal, behind the left back for "Bubble" to make the bye-line. However, his nasty, low cut-back whipped across the face of goal a metre in front of the arriving Grant.

In 24 minutes the breakthrough arrived with a neat move that began with "Tiger" freeing "Bubble" on the right. Midway within the half, he slipped the ball in to "Tago", who, in turn, played it in square to Mackay in the centre. Mackay then turned left and sent a high ball to "Dokus"s" toe on the left touch-line. "Dokus" misled his marker Gillies by turning inwards diagonally this time, took off at speed and placed an absolute peach behind Morrison for Grant to ghost to the bye-line, then whip across a low squared ball. The diving keeper, by the near post, couldn't cut it out and "Bubble" came in behind him in front of an attempted shield by McCarroll to knock home (1-0).

Carloway then seemed to slip down a gear for a period but it was the 32nd minute before the Niseachs were able to see Maclennan again. However, Smith's free-kick, 24 metres from goal in the centre, connected with Mackay's head and flew away for a corner.

Five minutes later a Carloway free-kick, on the left touch-line, 20 metres from goal, was sent in high by "Dokus". Mackay got his head to it, in front of goal, but it broke off a defender and was cleared back out to "Dokus", who immediately slipped past an approaching opponent to his right to make the bye-line but his high cross went high over the bar. The final chance of the first half came from yet another Niseach free-kick, 24 metres from goal in the centre, but no. Dunlop's solid right-footer whizzed a couple of metres over Maclennan's bar.

Half-time: Carloway 1 Ness 0

Carloway no doubt enjoyed their half-time orange slices after a reasonably solid first-half display, in which they set the rhythm and pace of play and created enough opportunities to suggest more would arrive in the second. Ness's problem was that despite the excellent performance of Russell-Smith, they had been unable to provide enough, in fact hardly any, quality balls to deadly striker, Jack Dunlop.

Within fifteen minutes, the destination of the Cup was settled. Early sustained Blues' pressure led to a series of treacherous corners from Crossley. His high right-footers from the Carloway right tormented the Niseach keeper and central defenders by dropping exquisitely down in front of goal, leading to scrambled clearances. In 49 minutes his third corner in a series caused the goalie and Mackay to outjump the ruck, practically under the bar. Mackay might have got the slightest touch to it with the back of his head; the ball bounced down on the line, then up, only for the desperate keeper to claw it away and out, but the stand-side line judge signalled it had crossed the line (**2-0**).

Four minutes later Ness did have a get-out-of-jail moment when Colin Morrison managed to supply Dunlop moving deep into the Blues' half, but his right-footer from the edge of the box was miscued and rose high over the club-house. This proved costly, as three minutes later, na Gormaich moved further ahead, Yet another Crossley corner from the right was punched out by the beleaguered keeper, only to be met by "Dokus" on the right edge of the box. His instant right-footer was charged down by Morrison and broke out square to the right, where Crossley immediately sent in a beautiful high right-footer towards the near post. Mackay came to meet it, 10 metres from goal, and head-glanced it onwards beyond the keeper and inside the far post (**3-0**).

In 59 minutes na Gormaich confirmed their ascendancy with a swift break down the left. Gillies tried to break forward diagonally into the centre of the Carloway half but "Tago", midway within his half, curved the ball clear out into the left of the Niseach half. Smith tried to intercept with a sliding lunge but failed and the ball carried on to Grant, who took off like an express train down the left. As the Ness stoppers moved to force him outwards at the corner of the box, the striker slipped a perfect squared low ball along the line of the box, and the arriving "Dokus" stretched expertly to meet it with his right foot and send it low inside the right corner of the Ness goal (**4-0**).

As Ness wobbled, two quick chances came Grant's way: in 63 minutes, "Tago", in the centre circle, played the young striker through on the left behind his marker and he raced forward, before cutting in 22 metres from goal and clipping in a low right-foot daisy-cutter but it went straight to the keeper. Moments later Armstrong ventured into the left of the Niseach half, and, 10 metres in from the touch-line, delivered a high cross which Grant nipped in front of Morrison to meet on the penalty spot, but his glancing header flashed a metre wide of the Ness left-hand post.

As the clock ran down, Ness had a final push to salvage something from the wreckage. In 71 minutes Russell-Smith, in the centre circle, found "Titch" moving cross-wise forwards, towards the Carloway left. The speed merchant made the bye-line, before tricking his way inwards past Armstrong and cracking in a low hard cross which found the unmarked "Mojo", 12 metres out in front of goal, but it came to him so fast, he couldn't get his feet in the right position and his left-foot knock was going past Maclennan's left-hand post before it was cleared. Moments later Russell-Smith found Vann moving fast towards the right of the Carloway box. From the right edge of the box he whacked a low, curling effort across Maclennan towards his right, but the United stopper got down well to palm away for a corner.

In 78 minutes it was the Ness keeper's turn to shine when Crossley broke on the Ness left and 12 metres from the bye-line sent a high cross which Gordon "Tago" met on the right of the box but the keeper did well to block his strong drive to his left.

The final two incidents of the game confirmed a clear victory for na Gormaich. With Ness, all things emanated from Russell-Smith and in 83 minutes he once more eluded his marker in the centre and moved rapidly into the Carloway half before playing an intelligent breaker, low to "Laxay's" right. As "D.I." moved forward to intercept, "Titch" shot across from the left to beat him to it and zoomed in behind "Laxay" on goal. As Maclennan came out, the young ace slipped the ball neatly to his right. The ball seemed to take an eternity to trundle towards goal but soon Morrison had the misfortune to see his effort strike the face of Maclennan's right-hand post and bounce clear.

Two minutes later "Dokus" was sent racing though on the right by "Tago", but his right-foot shot from 20 metres was blocked well by the keeper's right foot and spun away high in the air to the left of goal. As the arriving Gordon "Tago" turned to give chase, Neil Morrison seemed to climb on his back to clear and barged him to the ground. The award seemed a bit soft but "Tago" himself got up to strike a neat left-foot penalty just inside Ness's left-hand post (**5-0**).

Full-time: Carloway 5 (1) Ness 0 (0)

After the curious goal which opened second-half proceedings, there was a pervasive feeling of inevitability about the outcome of tonight's Final. Despite a drifting lack of focus at times in the first half, Carloway always had the edge throughout and as the game progressed and a concentration on structure and cohesion was achieved, Ness were soon left chasing a game that was rapidly leaving them behind. Though, at times, the Blues' midfield seemed to be operating separately, relying on the individual abilities of their midfielders: the assertiveness of "Tago" and Mackay, the industry of "Bubble", and game-changing creativity of Crossley, the Niseach midfield scarcely figured at all, apart from the tireless industry and creativity of Russell-Smith. However, as the Blues gradually developed and employed a selfless team effort and started passing and moving at pace, the goals soon arrived, and it became just *"another day at the office"* for na Gormaich. Another cup! Congratulations!

Carloway Man of the Match: Dan Crossley.

Ness Man of the Match: Micheil Russell-Smith.