

Coop Cup Semi-Final:

Carloway 2 (2) South End 1 (0)

Dan Crossley 15

Shaun MacCormick 58

Andrew "Tago" Maciver 23

At Cnoc a' Choilich.

Saturday, 19.8.17, 13.30.

Referee: Calum "Chancey" Macleod.

Far-side line judge: Kenneth "Bugsy" Smith.

Stand-side line judge: David "Spider" Macleod.

CARLOWAY: 4-5-1.

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

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

Gordon "Van Der Sar" Craigie

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

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

Andrew "Tago" Maciver ■

Subs. used: Billy Anderson (Gordon "Tago" Macdonald) 70; Jordan Macleod (Callum "Beag" Mackay) 76.

Subs. not used: Andrew "Lanky" Macdonald; Matthew Murray; Stuart "Gochan" Macleod.

Yellow card: Andrew "Tago" Maciver (dangerous play) 41.

SOUTH END: 4-4-2

Manager: D A Lindsay.

Allan Paul Steele Eddie Fitzgibbon

Jamie MacAulay Shaun MacCormick Duncan MacQuarrie (capt.) Marco MacDonald

Kevin Morrison Alasdair Steele John MacDonald Roderick Steele

Paul MacPhee

Sub. used: Innes MacDonald (Roderick Steele) 51

Subs. not used: Cailean Martindale; Jack Bainbridge; Marc Lindsay.

It's just over a month since Carloway beat Eriskay at Cnoc a' Choilich in Round 2 of this Cup but already it seems like something that occurred last century; the Barra game at Lioncleit in the previous round seems even earlier, of course, like an event during the Middle Ages. But occurred they did, and were won in some style, 5-2 and 8-2. This, added to the current run of five straight victories, with 20 goals scored, no doubt inspired a confidence in the home side that a second Coop Cup might be within their grasp, regardless of which squad members took the field today.

Availability was now na Gormaich's main concern for the last 2-3 games of the season as they attempted to claim a third trophy, which could complete an astonishingly turnaround of a season by joining the League Championship and EaF Cups on "Cobby's" mantelpiece.

Carloway's sole success in this competition was the ground-breaking victory in 2012 at Garrabost, when, in the deepening gloom of a September evening, Darren Mackinnon (now at Lochs) converted the vital penalty which ended na

Gormaic's 55-year quest for silverware, by clinching a 7-6 penalty shoot-out win over Back, after the sides' 1-1 draw in normal time. Only five of those record-makers were present today: Donald "D.I." MacIennan, Domhnall Mackay, Billy Anderson, Dan Crossley, and Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald, all except "D.I." taking part and succeeding in that heart-stopping shoot-out. This victory initiated the *anni mirabiles* which Carloway fans now enjoy but also wiped the gnawing misery of the 1-3 defeat to West Side in the Final two years before from the Blues' hard disc.

However, the misery soon returned, in 2014, when the Siarachs once again outwitted a battling Carloway 0-2, with two sparkling strikes from Ali "Barvas" Macleod. The following year na Gormaic let another Final appearance drift away from them, when a 92nd minute James Davidson winner in a Lionacleit Semi-Final caused a 2-3 defeat which allowed Barra to go on to Cup glory against Point. Last year's 1-5 SF thrashing to lochdar Saints is best forgotten.

Today's opponents were not unknown to the Blues, the sides having traded maulings since 2006. In late April that year, two early goals from Murdo "Squegg" Macleod and Neil Bowman sent Carloway unexpectedly into HAC Round 2, despite the then reigning Uist and Barra Champions clawing one back through a penalty late in the first half and edging the second. Two years later two much more explosive encounters ended with honours even. In early May, 2008, in Round 1 of the HAC in Carloway, it was the 63rd minute before Chris Macleod converted a sublime "Dokus" feed. Then, in a stunning final 6 minutes, the Blues registered four more against the tiring Uibhistich.

A week later the sides met again in Daliburgh, this time in the Coop Cup in, and South End were delighted to return the favour in what was an amazing game: the Blues were 2-0 up after four minutes ("Squegg" scoring from 60 metres in 3 seconds with the second kick of the game!), the tie was level at 3-3 each on 21, and South End led 5-3 by half-time. Another three goals in the second half made the final result 7-4 but the most memorable feature of the afternoon was a master-class in finishing from 5-goal Roddy Campbell, over from Skye for the match.

A year later the Blues returned, again in the HAC Round 1, but a late goal from Josie Campbell saw our heroes lose out 2-3, despite a reasonable second-half display. In the 2014 Coop Cup Round 2 the visitors were unable to field a team, but in the same round of the same Cup in May two years ago, Carloway ran out 6-3 victors, despite having to field a seriously weakened team, the highpoints for the Blues being a Lee Johnson hat-trick and a 4-goals-in-six-minutes riot in the second half.

The familiar line-up today was largely restored, with Joe Armstrong and Callum "Beag" Mackay returning at left-back and right-half/wing respectively; Gordon "Van Der Sar" Craigie replaced David Beaton in goal; and Gordon "Tago" Macdonald moved forward to left-half/wing. This meant Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald side-stepped into central midfield to join Dan Crossley and Domhnall Mackay, the latter freed from central defence by the availability of Donald "D.I." MacIennan beside Ali "Laxay" Macdonald; while Andrew "Tago"

Maciver took over the absent Kevin "Gochan" Macleod's role as striker.

Judging by the attendance - or lack of it - Carloway supporters don't seem to like Saturday fixtures, or maybe they simply don't like standing in miserable, drizzly conditions. Fortunately there was little wind (or midges) as a strong-looking Deasach outfit contested a forcing Blues' strategy all the way. Initially, play was largely confined to the middle third of Cnoc a' Choilich as Carloway began by employing their preferred calm approach, trying to hold and pass the ball around at the back, hoping to deliver the killer opening, inviting the visitors out to chase.

It was the 15th minute before that opening arrived and also gave the hosts the lead. A strong MacPhee goal-kick came high down the centre and was expertly brought down by "Laxay" midway within his own half. As the visitors did not advance, he immediately raced forward into the South End half, moving diagonally leftwards. As MacQuarrie came to tackle, midway within his own half, Macdonald lifted a short right-foot lob over Roderick Steele for Gordon "Tago" to ghost on to and make the bye-line. His sharp, high cross was met by "Pongo" in the centre, on the penalty spot, but his header seemed to be heading well outside MacPhee's right-hand post, when "Laxay", who had carried on into the Uibhisteach box and with his back to goal, tried for an overhead kick but miskicked. The ball broke out to Crossley, 12 metres from goal, and he instantly stabbed the ball deep inside the visitors' left-hand post (**1-0**).

A minute later it was almost two, when Crossley and Gordon "Tago" combined just inside the left side of the South End half to send a long, low diagonal into the box. MacPhee came, but, 12 metres out in front of goal, Callum "Beag" wriggled in behind John MacDonald to get his foot in in front of Alasdair Steele and nudge the ball to the keeper's right, but the keeper recovered in time to twist round and drop on the ball.

Seven minutes later na Gormaich did go further ahead in disputed circumstances. "Tiger" won the battle with A.P. Steele on the right touch-line, wall-passed with Callum "Beag" to make midway within the Deasach half, and then was blocked by Morrison into returning the ball to Callum "Beag". He in turn played it back to "D.I.", coming into the opposition half on the right, and he then delivered a perfect Mesut Ozil right-foot bender over the advancing line to find both "Tagos" all alone on the penalty spot. Andrew "Tago" brought the ball down, then slipped it quickly, low to the keeper's right. Everyone looked at the line judge. No flag! (**2-0**). The South End defenders were incensed. The only explanation is that the back-line had stepped forward a moment too late.

Two minutes later South End had a chance to claw their way back with a free-kick, 24 metres from goal in the centre, but though MacCormick's effort cleared the wall, it went straight to Craigie. A minute later Crossley, coming through the centre, released Gordon "Tago" between the two Steeles to make the left bye-line. He checked back and swung a low right-footer towards goal from an acute angle but MacPhee read it and blocked low down at the near

post with his foot. In 32 minutes "D.I." found "Tiger" on his right within the Blues' half and the full-back rode a MacAulay tackle to race diagonally forward into the centre of the South End half before slipping a sublime low breaker to MacDonald's right, for "Dokus" to roar into the left of the visitors' box. However, his sizzling low drive went well-wide of the far post.

Then suddenly the Uibhistich passed up a glorious free go at reducing the deficit. The last man, "Laxay", midway within his own half in the centre, tried to knock the ball forward to Mackay but hit Marco M. and the ball rebounded behind him. MacDonald was on it instantly and took off like Usain Bolt towards Craigie, pursued by "Laxay", who did manage to force him slightly to the right. As "Van Der Sar" came out, the young wing-man, from just inside the box, slammed a low, hard drive past the keeper's right hand - but at least a couple of metres outside the far post.

This let-off spurred the Blues to kill the game and in 43 minutes Mackay received the ball in the centre circle, then sent a beautiful diagonal between MacDonald and Steele for "Pongo" to run into the left of the box. One-on-one with MacPhee, the striker tried to slip the ball to the keeper's left, but MacPhee anticipated brilliantly to dive and block and the chance was lost.

Half-time: Carloway 2 South End 0

The Champions were hardly at their best on this miserable afternoon, performing like men forced to work on a day off - maybe they'd have preferred to be shopping with their partners or in the Star Inn - but just convincing enough to edge the half, although there were worrying signs towards the end of the 45 minutes that South End might just be taking their measure and asserting themselves.

Unfortunately, it soon appeared that someone must have slipped a Mickey Finn into the Carloway Bovril at the interval as a soporific Blues' squad immediately struggled to capture any of their lingering spark from the first half. The danger signs appeared as early as the 49th minute when Roderick S. floated in a perfect right-foot free-kick from the Carloway right touch-line, midway within the Blues' half, which forced Crossley to head out strongly in the centre. MacQuarrie forced it back into the box, and after a mad scramble back and forth, "D.I." managed to boot the ball as far as Dalmore beach.

The Deasachs were not deterred and two minutes later drove forward through the centre, MacDonald feeding MacQuarrie, whose attempted conversion from the edge of the box, deflected rightwards off "Laxay" to the Carloway left where the arriving Marco MacD. dispatched a first-time right-footer which looped across Craigie, smacked off the base of his right-hand post, and spun away. In 57 minutes another South End move was broken up by "D.I." in the right of the Blues' box and the defender, sensing the visitors' over-commitment, steamed off down the right touch-line to midway within his opponents' half. From the touch-line he delivered a high, inviting cross into the centre of the South End box, but MacPhee was unchallenged as he grasped the cross, without any Blue shirts within 20 metres of him.

A minute later, the visitors really threw down the gauntlet to the Champions. A surge down the South End left saw MacCormick and MacAulay combine to send the South End man past Callum "Beag", Crossley, and "Tiger" to reach the left bye-line, then check, trick "Tiger" a second time, and move in along their line. His attempted cross/shot was deflected outwards but still carried forward and MacCormick, 10 metres out by the near post, immediately slotted it across Craigie and inside the far post (2-1).

The Uist boys now scented blood from a team who had clearly lost shape and all cohesion and forced their hosts back and back gradually. However, force of numbers kept them at bay till the 67th minute when MacQuarrie seized on a misunderstanding in the centre circle between Crossley and Mackay and moved forward sharply. From 24 metres he thumped a low right-footer well, but Craigie got down fast to his right to force the ball away for a corner. The corner was knocked back out but MacAulay evaded a Callum "Beag" tackle to force his way in along the bye-line and lift the ball goal-wards. "Tiger" blocked it up and outwards but Fitzgibbon, 10 metres from goal in the centre, got his head to it, smacked it off the face of the bar, and a combined jump of "D.I." and Mackay managed to head it clear.

In 77 minutes another Deasach push up their left saw MacAulay supply Steele, who turned it in square to McCormick, 20 metres from goal on the Carlaway right. He immediately turned and cracked a left-foot rocket goal-wards but it cleared the central bar by a metre. Moments later, a MacDonald free-kick from the centre circle came in straight at Craigie but Mackay managed to head clear under pressure.

In the 82nd minute, the Leodhasaich had a chance to kill the game stone-dead, when a MacPhee goal-kick was met by Mackay, just inside his own half, and he immediately returned the ball straight forward. The ball rocketed back past a surprised Steele and "Pongo" charged forward through the line on to it. As MacPhee came to block, the Blues' man tried to flick it past him just inside the South End box, but the keeper stuck out his left foot to deflect it beyond his left-hand post.

In the 84th minute South End once more surged through the left with Morrison finding MacAulay, who in turn played on to MacCormick making the left edge of the Blues' box, but his flicked right-foot lob cleared the bar by a couple of metres. A minute later yet another escape arrived for the Champions, when, as they broke forward, a misunderstanding in the centre circle between Crossley and "Pongo" saw MacDonald win the ball. He took two paces forward, then sent a thundering right-foot drive the length of the Carlaway half, which twanged back off the centre of "Van Der Sar's" bar and was scrambled away.

With the Uist men totally over-committed forward, two sudden chances on the break arrived for na Gormaich in added-on time. A MacPhee goal-kick came out low upfield and Andrew "Tago", just inside his own half, headed it back strongly, then immediately gave chase. A surprised Steele was totally wrong-footed as "Pongo" charged past him towards goal. MacPhee came out and

again “Pongo” slipped the early ball to his left from the edge of the box, but again it trundled a metre outside the goalie’s left-hand post. A minute later a Mackay free-kick from the centre circle broke off heads in the centre of the box, to spin to the Carloway right. Sixteen metres from goal, “Dokus” met it first-time with a swinging right-foot but the ball sped across goal and well-wide of the far post.

And then, with more or less the last kick of the game, the Uibhistich thought they had made the penalty shoot-out. A break on the left saw Macaulay and MacCormick combine once more to force their way into the left of the box. From 16 metres MacCormick let go a right-footer which was slightly deflected upwards off a lunging Carloway boot, soared high across goal and was just dropping neatly inside Craigie's left-hand junction of bar and post, when the veteran spotted the danger and somehow got across to touch it away for a corner. What a save!

Full-time: Carloway 2 (2) South End 1 (0)

What to make of Carloway’s aimless second-half display? It wasn't lethargic, as they were trying as hard as ever, but it was still a real sugar-in-the-sump performance. Although the Blues never looked especially vibrant throughout, once they were 2-up in 23 minutes, without too much effort or ingenuity, the game had the appearance of only being marginally more difficult to handle than the Barra and Eriskay ties and another Final appearance seemed a matter of course.

The visitors, though strong, hard-working, and well-organized, did not pose any great threat up front in the first half. Goodness knows what happened to the team psych  at the interval, as throughout the entire second 45 minutes, na Gormaich simply seemed unable to find any touch, shape, or cohesion, any understanding of who was to do what, and this resulted in the team sinking farther and farther back into all-out defence, even more so when Shaun McCormick scored.

Ace *animateur*, Dan Crossley, ended up playing as a holding midfielder; Domhnall Mackay as assistant stopper; “Pongo”, the designated striker, operated from the centre line. South End were suddenly rampant and must have returned south wondering how on earth they did not manage to draw at least. So, a spiritless display by our heroes, hopefully a one-off. After all, a good team doesn’t suddenly become a bad team overnight. Everyone has bad days. Hopefully, this was just one of Carloway’s. And remember - they still won!

Carloway Man of the Match: Donald “D.I.” MacIennan.

South End Man of the Match: John MacDonald.