

Highland Amateur Cup Preliminary Round:

North Uist United 1 (0) Carloway 4 (0)

Ben Shepherd 74

Callum Masson 47, 69, 71

Kenny "Dokus" MacDonald 86

At Sgoil Uibhist a Tuath, Paible

Saturday 21st April 2018, 14:30

Referee: Neil Macritchie

North Uist United line judge:

Carloway line judge: Alasdair "Tiger" Macarthur

CARLOWAY: 3-5-2.

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

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

Gordon Craigie

Domhnall Mackay (capt.) Donald "D.I." MacIennan Joe Armstrong

Callum "Beag" Mackay Andy "Bernera" Morrison Stuart "Bubble" MacDonald ■ Warren Mackay

Kenny "Dokus" MacDonald

Callum Masson Neil Sinclair

Subs. used: Matthew Murray (Warren Mackay) 64; Andrew "Lanky" MacDonald (Kenny "Dokus" MacDonald) 89; Stuart "Gochan" Macleod (Callum "Beag" Mackay) 90.

Subs. not used: none.

Yellow cards: Stuart "Bubble" MacDonald (serious foul play) 67.

POINT: 4-4-2

Manager: John Docherty

Assistant Manager: Calum "Shin" MacDonald

Angus MacIntosh Finlay MacVicar

Scott Mackay ■ Adam Keltie Fazel Froughi Fraser MacDonald (capt.) ■

Craig MacLounan Donald MacIlwraith Jonathan MacDonald Lewis Docherty

Curtis Ireland

Subs. : Mark MacInnes; Ben Shepherd; Liam Holmes; Lee MacDougall.

Yellow cards: Fraser MacDonald (serious foul play) 55; Scott Mackay (serious foul play) 57.

If the memory of the second half at Garrabost on Monday night was still fresh in their minds, a trip south to the Southern Isles on Highland Amateur Cup business was probably one of the last fixtures the Blues were eager to fulfil. Such journeys are fraught with dangers: how strong is the squad willing to travel; the strength of the opposition is usually unknown; sometimes - but not this time - the early departure is not the best preparation, etc. Also, the long-serving members of the squad will remember previous nightmare treks southwards: the 1-5 thrashing in Coop Cup to lochdar Saints in July '16; the injury-time loss to Barra in the 2015 Coop Cup Semi-Final; the disputed 2-3 HAC loss to Southend in 2009; and, worst of all, the 4-7 Coop mauling by the same team the previous year.

However, to concentrate on the positive: na Gormaich had not failed against today's opponents in their three previous meetings. Their last encounter was seven years ago at this venue, Paible Schoolground, 6-0, in the HAC. The Blues had also

dispatched their weakened southern adversaries convincingly the year before at Cnoc a' Choilich in 2010. Then, Kevin "Gochan" Macleod notched five in a 9-0 Coop Cup romp. The 2006 HAC tie at Lionacleit was the closest run, when a slow start saw our heroes fall behind to a MacCorquodale strike, but recover in the second half to scrape through, thanks to Chris Macleod and Scott Macaulay. Surprisingly, this was the first time a Carloway eleven had won two consecutive rounds in the HAC and their first-ever victory out-with Lewis and Harris.

Today's notable absentees were the ill Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur and injured Lee Johnson (hamstring), while our own Uibhisteach, Archie MacDonald, was unavailable. However, defence pillar, Donald "D.I." MacIennan, was fit again and Warren Mackay débuted in central midfield, so "Windy" was able to slot "D.I." straight into his usual role beside the captain, Domhnall Mackay, while right-sided wing-half/forward, Callum "Beag" Mackay was given the rather onerous task of covering the right flank behind Callum Masson.

What they faced was unknown: Calum "Shin" MacDonald has retired, while there was no sign of Ruaraidh Macleod, outstanding in the 2010 game, or Joe 90, their bespectacled 14-year-old sub. from that game.

2006's participants enjoyed a beautiful, warm morning, with a fair southerly breeze, though the playing surface that day, newly sown and mown, resembled a freshly-cut corn field. Conditions were slightly different this afternoon, to put it mildly. A howling sou' easterly that chilled the bones of the tiny crowd seemed intent on lifting the schoolhouse into the Atlantic, but the playing surface, though bumpy, had matured, seemed well-drained, and certainly out-ranked the home of football on Goathill Road.

Playing attractive football was impossible, given the conditions. Whether playing with the wind, as na Gormaich did in the first half, was preferable to playing against it, is open to discussion. In the opening 45 minutes, Carloway could not harness it. An early burst from "Dokus" coming in on the left was blocked 16 metres from goal, before a heart-stopping moment arrived for the Blues in the 8th minute. After a corner was headed clear, a second Uist corner from their right was met full-force in the centre, 12 metres from goal, by Keltie, but "Van Der Sar" until then inactive, reacted instinctively, high to his left, to push the ball away for a third corner. It should have been a wake-up call for the Leodhasaich but it was the Uist men who burst through again in the 12th minute and it took a last-gasp "D.I." tackle on the penalty spot to stop MacIntosh's break on goal.

It was the 20th minute before na Gormaich threatened Ireland when Mackay supplied Callum "Beag" with a forward diagonal to his right. The wingman steamed forward, then sent a beautiful low breaker straight forward inside MacLounan for Masson to carry to 16 metres from the line before sending across an inviting high cross. However, Ireland was alive to the danger and beat MacIlwraith and Mackay to the high ball in the centre.

In 29 minutes Docherty supplied his captain down the Uist right, and, midway within the Carloway half, he turned neatly square inside Armstrong to send a powerful right-footer a metre over Craigie's bar. Four minutes later a long, low ball forward by

“D.I.” allowed Sinclair to ghost unmarked behind the line but the pace of the ball deceived him and he was unable to touch it past the advancing keeper.

Then, in 35 minutes, close things at either end: the Uist men again came down the right but MacDonald’s attempted slip through the line for MacVicar was blocked, 12 metres from goal, and a huge clearance downfield was caught by the wind and lifted over the retreating line. Sinclair managed to control the spinning ball, moving rightwards, but Ireland came whizzing out to dive at his feet, 12 metres from goal, and block his slip. More danger arrived for the Blues in 38 minutes when a Mackay free-kick on the right edge of the Carloway box hit the wall, resulting in a second free-kick on the Uist right but MacIntosh’s connecting header in the centre flew well-over from 16 metres.

On the whistle na Gormaich thought they had opened their account when a mighty Mackay free-kick from just inside his own half, on the Carloway right touch-line, dropped right on top of Ireland, but was forced home by a combination of “Bernera” and Sinclair. However, one or other was adjudged to have used a raised elbow in the clash with the keeper.

Half-time: North Uist United 0 Carloway 0

At this point, honours were even. Conditions had militated against any neat or well-structured football, though both sides had not let the weather detract from their commitment and effort, and there had been the odd scare at either end. However, whatever “Windy” put in his squad’s half-time Bovril certainly worked. Immediately the Blues conceded yet another free-kick, in the centre, midway within their own half. Mackay harnessed the wind well, but his careful effort flew just over Craigie’s bar at the speed of light.

A minute later Carloway’s best move of the game provided the break-through. “D.I.” snuffed out an attack to the left edge of his box, then moved forward to fire down the line to Sinclair, who played on the early ball to “Dokus”. On the bye-line, “Dokus” performed his characteristic reverse-step backward, then sent a low cross across the face of the goal. Masson reacted first to nip in in front of MacDonald and flick the ball past Ireland to his left (**0-1**).

Four minutes later Mackay réprised his earlier effort, from the same position, and this time “Van Der Sar” had to look sharpish and push the ball over his bar. In 58 minutes another chance came begging for the Blues, when Sinclair managed to nod the ball back to Masson, out on the Carloway right, 20 metres from the line. Masson neatly dummied his way past MacLounan and sent over a wicked high cross towards the far post, but the arriving “Bernera”, in front of goal, 10 metres out, couldn’t get over the racing ball and his header zoomed high and wide.

In 67 minutes Mackay once more tried his luck, this time with a free-kick on the Uist left touch-line, midway within the Blues’ half, but his powerful drive went well-over this time. Then, in two eventful minutes, the game was effectively over.

In 69 minutes “D.I.” again thwacked the ball down the left from his own half and neat interplay between “Dokus” and Sinclair in the corner saw the ball swept low across the face of goal for Masson to come in, unmarked by the far post, to send a forceful

low right-footer across Ireland and inside his right-hand post (0-2).

Two minutes later a Uist push was broken up by Mackay and "D.I.", 22 metres from their own goal, and MacIennan found Sinclair in front of him, and he quickly played it right to Masson who was only too happy to move forward to the right of the box and crack home a thunderous daisy-cutter from 20 metres (0-3).

The job appeared to be done but an unwelcome warning about complacency arrived three minutes later. A Macdonald free-kick, on the right touch-line, 20 metres from the line, was driven invitingly across the face of the Carloway goal behind the line, tantalisingly out of reach of the keeper. Ten metres from goal, in the centre, Shepherd was first to it in the scrum with a neat flick to Craigie's right, which the veteran was unlucky not to push away with his right hand (1-3).

Containment now became Carloway's *modus operandi*, winding down the clock, giving "Lanky" and "Gochan" their moment, and hoping for a quick breakaway. And one duly arrived in the 86th minute, thanks to an amazing dribbling run by "Bubble", the length of the park, down the left from his own area to the opposition bye-line. He checked back on the line, outwitted two defenders, then found "Dokus" 16 metres from goal, by the near post. His immediate left-foot sizzler was blocked by Ireland, but its power saw it smash up off the keeper's hands, over his head, and home (1-4).

Full-time: North Uist United 1 Carloway 4

At Point the squad died in the second half, after a bright opening. Today, the opposite was true: a second half performance which banished the memory of the unsatisfying first. To a certain extent, na Gormaich wore down the Uibhistich, tired them out so that they lost their shape during the second half. They certainly didn't outplay a North Uist side which was 1000% better than the sides of 2010 and 2011, and if the Keltie header had gone in, what sort of game might have developed? Anyway, enough "*What ifs*

Our heroes did enough here today, in very trying circumstances, to show that there are modest grounds for optimism this season. Mackay and "D.I." gel perfectly at the back, the latter bringing adamantine grit to the line, while Callum "Beag" Mackay, a revelation in his assigned role today, had probably his best performance so far for the Blues. Warren Mackay's contribution will clearly be an asset too, once he has a few games under his belt. Generally, each squad member stepped up a gear from Garrabost, exhibiting a fighting quality which is as important as talent in island football. Hopefully, they will sustain it, against Athletic next Friday.

North Uist United Man of the Match: Scott Mackay.

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