

Highland Amateur Cup Round 1:

Carloway 1 (0) Lochs 2 (1)

Neil Sinclair 63

John "Uig" Morrison 33

Jim O'Donnell 69

At Cnoc a' Choilich, Carloway.

Saturday, 12.5.18, 18.30.

Referee: Calum "Chancey" Macleod.

Carloway line judge: Alasdair "Tiger" Macarthur

Lochs line judge: Grant Hunter.

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 Archie MacDonald Joe Armstrong

Calum Masson Stuart "Bubble" Macdonald Domhnall Mackay (capt.) ■ Murdo "Squegg" Macleod

Ross Maciver

Neil Sinclair

Subs. used: Dan Crossley (Ross Maciver) 57; Callum "Beag" Mackay (Murdo "Squegg" Macleod) 80; Andy "Bernera" Morrison (Joe Armstrong) 86; Billy Anderson (Neil Sinclair) 90.

Sub. not used: Andrew "Lanky" Macdonald.

Yellow card: Domhnall Mackay (serious foul play) 52.

LOCHS: 3-5-2.

Manager: Kevin Anderson

Jim O'Donnell Lewis Mackenzie

Peter "Robbie" Mackenzie ■ David Macmillan Andy Murray John "Uig" Morrison Darren "Cage" Wilson

Daniel "Nipper" Mackenzie Ali "Laxay" Macdonald Peter Mackenzie (capt.)

James Macleod

Subs. used: Ross Allison (David Macmillan) 2; Gordon "Tago" MacDonald (Ross Allison) 77; Calum Campbell (Andy Murray) 90.

Yellow card: Peter "Robbie" Mackenzie (serious foul play) 73.

This evening it was very much, "Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more" as our heroes were called on to "imitate the action of the tiger; Follow your spirit, and upon this charge; Cry": 'Thugamaid, na Gormaich!'. All sorts of clichés could be applied to their task tonight: "Face your demons"; "a problem faced is a problem". Solved? Well, maybe not. Hopefully.

Increasingly, Lochs are looking like the team to beat this season, the gold standard for 2018, having already pocketed the ABC Cup. So, if the Blues were unable to beat them after three tries - at home - well, where did that leave na Gormaich, with a whole season stretching before them? On the plus side, Carloway did play well for substantial parts of the previous two matches and had a sizeable slice of bad luck. In the ABC tie, they had shaded at least 50% of the action, maybe more, and in the League had fought back from a 2-goal deficit and seemed to be about to assert themselves in the second half before being hit by a questionable penalty decision.

So, to tonight: Kenny "Dokus" Macdonald was still out and Kevin "Gochan" Macleod

unavailable, but David Beaton returned between the sticks and Neil Sinclair re-emerged as front-man. Young star, Ross Maciver, made a surprise, and very welcome, reappearance in left midfield, and this meant that Andy "Bernera" Morrison and Callum "Beag" Mackay both started in the bull-pen, beside Billy Anderson, Andrew "Lanky" Macdonald and, astonishingly, all-time-great, Dan Crossley, who at one point indicated he was taking a season out.

Lochs made one change from the previous encounter, Ali "Laxay" Macdonald coming in to the starting line up in place of Gordon "Tago" MacDonald. Positionally, Peter "Robbie" Mackenzie moved from central defence to the left midfield berth "Tago" had occupied, and the Maroons' strike capability was imposing.

Scottish weather is, if nothing else, unpredictable; on Wednesday night Cnoc a' Choilich was like midwinter in Goose Bay, with a wind akin to those that sweep the Red Spot on Jupiter; tonight, a reasonable crowd, perhaps not as much as hoped for, experienced a mild early summer's evening with only a slight breeze, clear sky, and brilliant setting sun, which troubled the visitors in the opening half. Carloway's game-plan clearly included "*mixing it*", a determination not to sit back as the men from Leurbost, orchestrated by prime *animateur*, Andy Murray, wove their intricate patterns through them. Upping the pace was also a requirement, given the average age of the opposition. To a certain degree it worked, and a congested centre-field led to limited supply to Sinclair, O'Donnell, and Allison, and a first-half of few chances.

The first surprise was the departure of the inspirational David Macmillan after only two minutes with a leg strain, but there was little joy for the Blues as his replacement was the ebullient Ross Allison. In 13 minutes the first real chance arrived when Jim O'Donnell was bundled off the ball midway within the Carloway half, slightly towards the right, but John "Uig's" carefully-flighted right-footer travelled beyond the rushing Allison, 16 metres out by the far post.

Six minutes later a golden opportunity came the home side's way when "Tiger" was supplied by "D.I." on the right touch-line within his own half. Just short of the halfway line, he delivered a long, inviting diagonal through the Lochs' back-line which allowed Sinclair to break forward unhindered on goal, and face an advancing Macleod. However, from 16 metres his attempted slip to the keeper's left was anticipated expertly by the keeper and blocked and held securely.

Moments later a headed clearance from "Nipper" into the centre of the Carloway half was seized on by Murray, who then strode forward a few paces before sending in a low daisy-cutter from 22 metres to Beaton's right, but the keeper managed to get down smartly to push it away for a corner. In 27 minutes a Lochs' surge down their right saw Mackay intercept midway within his own half, before moving forward and finding Masson, racing behind "Nipper" and into the Lochs' half. From the bye-line, 18 metres out, he cut back a nasty, low drive which Macleod, guarding his near post, could only touch as it passed but not stop. However, in the ensuing scramble, 12 metres out in front of goal, involving Sinclair, "Cage", and Peter M., the ball broke back high to the grateful keeper. Two minutes later Mackay once more won the ball, this time on the centre line, and immediately supplied Masson in front of him. He in turn lifted a high diagonal to his right for "Bubble" to make the bye-line, then trick his

way inwards. As his cut-back cross came over, Macleod, by the near post, managed to fist it away strongly, out of his area.

In 31 minutes the best chance so far of the half arrived when a long clearance by Peter M. was mis-timed by "D.I.", midway within his own half, in the centre, and his header flew behind him to his right. Allison was straight on to it, with a clear run in on Beaton, and from 20 metres his attempted lob did clear the advancing keeper - but went a metre over the bar. However, two minutes later, the opener arrived. A crunching MacDonald tackle in the centre on O'Donnell, 22 metres from goal, led to a John "Uig" free-kick being curled exquisitely over the wall high and just inside Beaton's right-hand post (**0-1**). An absolute peach!

Three minutes later Morrison almost set up a second when he side-stepped Mackay, moved into the centre of the Carloway half and then sent a sweeping Jimmy McIlroy through the line leftwards, towards Allison. Sixteen metres from goal, the young star got to the racing ball before the advancing keeper and flicked it on to the keeper's right, but the pace of the ball was too great and it crossed the bye-line before he could stroke it into the empty goal.

Half-time: Carloway 0 Lochs 1

Naturally a 0-1 deficit is unwelcome but Carloway's performance had still been a 100% improvement on last Wednesday's. A greater self-belief had fed a stronger commitment and an unflinching willingness to lock horns, an appetite to get things "*done*", as it were. Overall, also, the contest had been vastly more entertaining - so far - than Wednesday's, but that might also have been a consequence of the more favourable weather situation tonight, more conducive to attractive game-play.

Immediately, Lochs almost doubled their lead. A John "Uig" corner on their right came over head-high; Lewis M. raced to meet it by the near post, 12 metres out, but his firm back-header flew a foot over Beaton's right-hand bar.

A growing stalemate in the centre led "Windy" to up the ante in 57 minutes, replacing the tiring Maciver with the pacy ingenuity of Dan Crossley. The gamble swiftly paid off, when an increasingly aggressive Carloway drew level after 63 minutes. A long clearance from the Carloway box down the centre was mis-timed by "Laxay", the ball breaking behind him. As the centre-half slid back to recover the ball, Sinclair rode his tackle, then managed to slip the ball past the challenging Peter M. to his left, round him, and run in at speed towards Macleod. As the keeper advanced, Sinclair took his time before whacking a rising right-footer to Macleod's left and high into the net (**1-1**).

However, just as the Blues felt they were edging control, bad news arrived at the rear. A "Cage" throw-in, right beside Carloway's left corner flag, came in high and square, then bounced high outside the near post. The ball deceived the covering "D.I." as he moved towards it, bouncing high over his head, and O'Donnell came in behind him, jumped, and headed the simplest of goals just inside Beaton's left-hand post from 10 metres (**1-2**).

The Blues did not falter, despite this reverse, continuing to take the game to the visitors, but few clear-cut chances materialized. It was the 82nd minute before an

opportunity, of sorts, appeared. A Crossley free-kick out on the left touch-line, 16 metres from the bye-line, was swung in high across the Lochs' box, and met low by Sinclair beyond the far post, to hook back into the centre of goal. This led to a stramash in front of Macleod as Mackay, then "D.I.", had strikes blocked by John "Uig", before the ball spun away to the Lochs' left and was cleared downfield by "Laxay". Six minutes later came na Gormaich's best chance to save the tie, when "Bernera", breaking on the right, tried to slip the forward through the middle but Peter M. intercepted and lobbed downfield. Crossley met the ball just inside the Lochs' half in the centre and his immediate straight return could not be controlled by "Laxay" and ran through to Masson moving behind the line in the centre. However, his rising right-foot drive from 16 metres was read perfectly by Macleod and brilliantly tipped over the bar.

In added-on time a high Peter M. clearance downfield was fumbled by Archie MacDonald in the centre, midway within his own half, and O'Donnell was quick to rob him and speed right. On the right edge of the box, he squared left but the supporting Robert M. was unable to control the ball and it carried on to the unmarked "Tago" on the left. His instant early left-foot lob cleared the advancing Beaton but went well over the central bar.

Surprisingly, there was still time for Carloway to win two more chances: three minutes into added-on time a MacDonald charge through the centre was halted illegally on the left edge of the Lochs' box, and the Uibhisteach got up and struck a right-footer instantly towards goal, hoping to surprise Macleod, but, in his haste, he miscued badly and the ball went well-wide of the right-hand post. A minute later a Crossley run came to an abrupt end, 22 metres from goal in the centre. However, Anderson's measured low right-foot strike did go through the wall but a couple of feet wide of Macleod's right-hand post.

Full-time: Carloway 1 (0) Lochs 2 (1)

So, another year drifts by, another early exit from the glittering prize occurs, and already that August afternoon in Inverness in 2014 seems a distant memory, soon to be an unthumbed page in an old history book. Soon we may even adopt the Trumpian attitude to unpleasant events and describe the whole thing as "*fake news*"; something that never really happened. In reality, however, those of us who were actually there know that it will always remain a monument to what might have been - if only "Gus's" playing career had not been finished at Ness 10 days before; if only Dan Crossley's knee had stood up to the whole 90 minutes.

Ah, well, the sliding doors effect does no favours. Tonight, the Blues' display recalled the old army mantra: "*Prior planning and preparation prevents p*** - poor performance.*" It looked as if "Windy", Domhnall, and "Gus" had thought long and hard over what was the best approach to face Lochs, based on the evidence of the two previous encounters, to achieve the result they needed. If Lady Fortune had been with the Blues, their strategy might have delivered. Carloway did come close several times, even edged the chances, in a very even, well-contested tie which could have gone either way, right to the end. Positivity is everything in sport and na Gormaich had plenty of that tonight, but a lack of sharpness at times, at both ends of the pitch, cost them dearly. Maintaining that positive approach may be the key to a

moderately successful season.

Carloway Man of the Match: Dan Crossley (only on for over half an hour but made a huge difference, as did Billy Anderson's handful of minutes).

Lochs Man of the Match: John "Uig" Morrison.