

Jock Stein Cup Semi-Final:

Ness 3 (0)

Carloway 1 (1)

Micheil Russell-Smith 56 (pen.), 72, 89 Eachainn Miller 34

At Fivepenny, Ness.

Wednesday, 6.6.18, 19.00.

Referee: Neil Macritchie.

Stand-side line judge: Andrew Macaulay.

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

CARLOWAY: 4-5-1.

Manager: Graeme "Windy" Miller.

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

David Beaton

Callum "Beag" Mackay Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur ■ Archie MacDonald Joe Armstrong ■

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

Andy "Bernera" Morrison

Eachainn Miller

Subs. used: Calum "Killer" Mackay (Andy "Bernera" Morrison) 79.

Subs. unused: Andrew "Lanky" Macdonald; Andrew "DD" Macleod; Matthew Murray.

Yellow cards: Joe Armstrong (foul play) 72; Domhnall Mackay (dissent) 72; Cameron "Tiger" Macarthur (aggressive behaviour) 76; Calum "Killer" Mackay (foul play) 83.

NESS: 4-4-2.

Manager: Chris Macdonald.

Asst. Manager: Donald "Sweeney" Macsween.

James "Titch" Morrison ■ Colin Morrison

Shaun "Lefty" Macdonald Innes Smith Colin George Morrison ■ Micheil Russell-Smith

Kevin "Egg" Graham Neil Morrison (capt.) Donald Gillies Scott Macrury

Ali Murray

Subs. used: John Alexander Maciver (Neil Morrison) 38.

Subs. unused:

Yellow cards: Colin George Morrison (foul play) 46; James "Titch" Morrison (aggressive behaviour) 76.

Tonight, na Gormaich headed north-east to Fivepenny, to take on a resurgent Ness in a Jock Stein Cup Semi-Final, a reward for overcoming United on 16th May at Goathill, 2-0. The dour struggle in the Big Smoke had seemed destined to end in extra-time, even penalties, before Neil Sinclair and Calum Masson put the few diehards present out of their misery in the last 20 minutes. Since then, of course, despite a return to Goathill for an even more dispiriting 0-0 League draw with United, Carloway seemed to have discovered a certain cohesion - and ability to hit the target more frequently - with a hard-earned 5-2 Co-op Cup victory over South End, and back-to-back victories over local rivals, West Side. Against the Siarachs, a grinding 2-0 win in an EaF Round 1 Leg 1 victory at Barvas was followed quickly by an exhilarating 3-1 League success at Cnoc a' Choilich.

Tonight, however, circumstances enforced changes to the Blues' line-up: Donald "D.I." MacIennan was recuperating from a hand operation and would be out for a fortnight, at least, while striker Neil Sinclair was on a training course in Birmingham. This required Archie MacDonald to move back into central defence beside Cameron

"Tiger" Macarthur, while Eachainn Miller assumed the role of lone front man. Murdo "Squegg" Macleod and Andy "Bernera" Morrison then filled the vacancies in left midfield. The hosts, themselves, did not have their troubles to seek, with Jack Dunlop, Allan MacDonald, Justin Cupit, and Calum Vann all injured, and Iain Murdo Macleod, Ali "Bones", and Jack McCarroll unavailable. However, ex-West Side star, Colin George Morrison, and Scott Macrury were slotted in in midfield, and Kevin "Egg" Graham made an appearance in central defence beside Neil Morrison. The sides only met three times last season and featured resounding victories each time for the Blues, 6-2 here in the League last July, due to an Angus Grant hat-trick and Dan Crossley double; 4-1 in the return at Cnoc a' Choilich, and a 5-0 thrashing in the EaF Final at Garrabost in early August. Indeed, Ness had not defeated their visitors since 2012, though, ominously, this season they had won all five of their home games, scoring 21 goals, and only conceding twice.

Both sides began as if they had a train to catch, and in the immediate end-to-end clashes, Ness won a free-kick on the right edge of the Carloway box. However, Colin George's right-foot strike for goal took off and just missed the nearby social club. The visitors' first chance arrived in the 13th minute when a long Mackay throw-in midway within the Ness half on the Carloway right was back-headed on by Masson. Miller then raced in by the near post to touch the ball past Murray from 12 metres but Gillies managed to whip it away under pressure to his right, just in front of the goal-line.

From the eighteenth minute onwards, however, Carloway were lucky to survive a sustained period of home pressure: a Macrury corner on the Ness left flashed invitingly across the face of the Carloway goal, 12 metres out, with no takers, and the ball was then punted downfield by Armstrong from the opposite corner. Graham headed back strongly from the centre-line towards Russell-Smith on the right. On the touch-line, 20 metres from the bye-line, the playmaker doubled back and slipped a low, square ball in to Macrury, in the centre, just outside the box. His careful, in-swinging left-footer seemed headed for Beaton's top-right hand corner, before the keeper, squinting into the sun, managed to touch it a foot over his own bar at the last minute. In quick succession, a further two corners ensued after a "Titch" run on the left was crowded out, and then a Russell-Smith drive blocked, before the Blues were able to break forward. However, in the 27th minute, yet another "Titch" run, into the left of the Carloway half, saw him out-run the back-line to make 6 metres from the bye-line, 12 metres outwards from goal. Nevertheless, Beaton reacted well, to block his low left-footer with his left leg and, even better, hold.

It was the 31st minute before Carloway threatened when Armstrong won the ball on the left centre-line, then came forward to supply a sublime Jimmy McIlroy inside the defender for Miller to race clear down the left to the bye-line. He checked, then sent in a right-foot cross which was headed out, but met on the volley by "Bubble", 16 metres from goal on the right. However, his right-footer sped a couple of metres outside the far post. Three minutes later "Bubble" supplied Miller in front of him, midway within the Niseach half, and he managed to surge leftwards away from Graham to make 22 metres from goal. Unfortunately, his low cut-back across the keeper was read well by Murray and knocked on with his out-stretched left leg for a corner on his left. From the corner came the breakthrough, however. Masson's corner was met by Mackay by the near post, and his glancing header bounced down

and up sharply towards goal, but Murray reacted brilliantly to touch the ball with his left hand on to the underside of the bar. However, Miller was first to react to the loose ball and whipped it home from 6 metres (**0-1**).

Two minutes later the home side passed up an excellent opportunity to equalize when Russell-Brown supplied "Titch" from the right of his own half ahead of him to his left. Morrison took off like Carl Lewis, pursued vainly by Callum "Beag" the length of the Blues' half. Twelve metres from the bye-line he squared left to Colin George Morrison, coming in in the centre, but the striker didn't connect properly and Beaton was only too happy to drop on the trickling ball coming towards him. Three minutes later another chance went begging when Russell-Smith one-two'd with "Titch" down the left and surged into the left of the Carloway box, but Beaton was out sharply to beat away his attempted right-foot lob/shot from 16 metres.

Half-time: Ness 0 Carloway 1

The main surprise at this point was that only one goal had been scored. It had been a hectic 45 minutes, with the Niseachs edging the chances, although Carloway's fewer chances had been more clear-cut. The pace didn't drop and in 51 minutes Carloway were denied again by a lightning reaction from Murray. "Tiger" won the ball within his own half in the centre and found Callum "Beag" with a glorious Frank de Boer, as he broke down the right touch-line. Mackay checked on 20 metres and slid across a square ball to an unmarked "Bubble" in the centre. The midfielder had time to line his shot up before firing a high right-footer to the keeper's right, but the big goalie immediately threw out a right hand to fist the ball away brilliantly to his right.

Five minutes later, however, the game was thrown wide open, when an enormous Murray kick-out straight down the field was allowed to bounce high through the left of the Carloway defence. MacDonald could only touch it on with his head as "Titch" immediately gave chase, hotly pursued by Armstrong. Sixteen metres from goal, the players closed, "Titch" went down, and the line judge flagged. The referee didn't hesitate; nor did Russell-Smith as he hammered the ball high and straight over the diving Beaton who chose left (**1-1**).

In 65 minutes a Masson corner from the right was met by Maciver by the near post but the young defender sliced the ball badly, straight up and back over his head, where Mackay met it high, 12 metres out, and headed it downwards towards goal. "Bubble" touched it leftwards but "Bernera" was unable to reach it as it crept outside the far post. Seven minutes later the captain was the villain as he brought down Russell-Smith, 22 metres out, as the Niseach moved across the Carloway half rightwards. The young star got up and sent the most exquisite of right-foot free-kicks over the wall and curling high inside Beaton's right-hand post (**2-1**). An absolute peach!

Four minutes later Russell-Smith was unable to repeat the feat with a second free-kick from roughly the same position but as the clock ran down, an increasingly desperate Carloway managed to surge down the left in 86 minutes. A Masson throw-in from close to the corner flag came in to Archie MacDonald, 16 metres from goal, and he turned inwards to send a low left-footer across goal. Miller met it in the centre, but, under pressure from behind, was only able to flick it straight up and over

the bar. Three minutes later, the tie was decided. A free-kick deep in the Carloway half, by their left corner flag, was taken short and came back to Russell-Smith 18 metres from the bye-line. He turned in square across Callum "Beag" and as Mackay approached, stroked home a low left-footer to Beaton's left from the edge of the box (3-1).

The Blues' final hurrah came in the 90th minute when a Miller free-kick from 20 metres, to the right of the box, was curled expertly round the wall, but hit the base of Murray's left-hand post, and went past.

Full-time: Ness 3 (0) Carloway 1 (1)

Carloway had three main problems tonight: the pace of James "Titch" Morrison, the skill of Micheil Russell-Smith, and an inability to put the ball in the net. They won't always encounter the first two; but they certainly will have to deal with the third. It's a predicament that seems to surface every game or two, or half or two. There's no want of commitment or industry in the side, or desire to create from the back and work their way forward, but sometimes it seems as if the focus on holding the ball and setting up the best chance possible takes over from taking the chance itself. A bloater now and then might suffice, or against certain sides or in certain situations, the Sam Allardyce approach: get the ball hoofed down there fast, then have a go.

At times there certainly was a worrying lack of pace at the back, an inability to keep abreast of breaking attackers to get a foot in, hence the spate of irritating small fouls in dangerous situations, but the immediate problem seems to be getting bodies into the opposition box, to meet the ball when it actually arrives there.

Ness Man of the Match: Micheil Russell-Smith.

Carloway Man of the Match: Eachainn Miller.