Press and Journal

HIGHLAND LEAGUE

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Race on to stage North Cup final showdown

WICK ACADEMY 0
FORRES MECHANICS 0

by **Bill McAllister**

THE third attempt at settling the remaining McEwan's Lager North Cup semi-final is posing problems to arrangements for the final.

For after an abandonment and a draw the winners will not now be known until Saturday evening — only a week before the big match.

If Forres win, the final will be at Elgin and if Wick succeed it will be at Caledonian Stadium, Inverness. The delay in clarifying the venue is causing hassle for Grampian TV, who are televising the final.

Holders Lossiemouth must wait to find out their opponents, because Academy and Mechanics have now played 135 minutes without scoring a goal.

Forres manager Dave Milroy said: "I know the delay is causing problems, because the third match is so near to the final, but perhaps this will influence the competition being played later in the season.

"This would avoid the kind of abandonment we had last week due to the gale and it would also end the season on a high note with a big occasion."

The Mechanics' boss will ring the changes for Wednesday's home Press and Journal Highland League game with bottom club Fort William.

Winger Charlie Brown and defender Craig Reid took knocks at Harmsworth Park and are unlikely to be risked in midweek to make sure they are fit for Saturday.

"I will juggle the side about a bit to keep the lads fresh and give a chance to those who have been waiting," said Milroy.

Alan Houston, Gary Watt, Innes Simpson and Gary Robertson are all candidates to return.

Wick will have striker Alan Duff available again. The former Ross County hitman has not kicked a ball since before Christmas and manager Don Cowie said: "He won't start, because he is not match fit, but his experience could make a telling contribution coming off the bench."

Wick certainly don't feel their chance has gone, because they failed to clinch the tie at home — for Academy's away record is far superior to their home form.

They have done well in Moray before, including victories at Elgin and Lossiemouth, and Mosset Park holds no fear for them.

Cowie commented: "It was windy again and the two teams basically cancelled each other out, so a draw was a fair result. But we played sensibly and we seem to save our best performances for away games, so we are happy enough.

"Gordon Roberston won the sponsor's man-of-the-match award, but I thought Stuart Sutherland, who came in for Cammy Robertson, was our best player."

WICK ACADEMY — Stewart, Campbell, Clarkson, McLeod, Miller, Robertson, Gunn, Sutherland, Hughes (Begg), Murray, MacDonald.

FORRES MECHANICS — Gray, MacDonald, Munro, Reid, Walker, Sanderson, Minty, Mitchell, Holmes, Murphy, Brown.

Nervy Huntly just happy to hang on, says Rougvie

■ **The chase is on . . . Gary Whyte (left) challenges Elgin City's Ross McHardy during Saturday's game at Christie Park.**
Photograph: Sandy McCook

HUNTLY 2
ELGIN CITY 1

by **Kevin Williams**

HUNTLY manager Doug Rougvie admitted to breathing a sigh of relief when the referee blew the final whistle at Christie Park on Saturday. He had seen his side hang on to an early two-goal lead against a plucky Elgin City team who battled bravely to get back into the game.

"We were a bit nervy in the second half and I was just happy to collect the three points," said Rougvie. "We are not playing particularly well at the moment and the fluency has gone out of our game.

"Teams come here and lift their game against the champions and Elgin were no exception. They never gave up, although we had several chances to kill the game before they scored.

Effort

"We have to match the effort of these teams who are having a real go at us and we have to cut out all the careless mistakes."

Huntly were quick off the blocks and sprinted into a two-goal lead after only nine minutes. Gary Whyte did what he does best, winning a header from a John Brown cross and Martin Stewart was on hand to nudge home at the far post.

Elgin's stand-in goalkeeper for the day, ex-Lossie and Forres Mechanics custodian Tony Grigor, must have been wondering what he had let himself in for when he picked out the ball from the back of the net for the second time.

He watched Alan Selbie's chipped 25-yard free kick clear his defensive wall and sail over his head into the roof of the net.

Minutes later, Grigor kept alive the game as a contest when he spread himself to deflect a shot from Simon Scott.

Elgin, who had defended far too deeply in the opening period, showed that they were not going to lie down when they produced a lively spell just before the interval.

The introduction of Russell McKay at half-time seemed to give the visitors a boost in confidence that had been sadly lacking.

"I would dearly love to play Russell for 90 minutes, but with the injury problems he has, he is simply not fit enough," said Elgin's manager Chico McHardy.

"He transformed the midfield with his presence and the longer the game went on, the better we got. I was happy with the players' attitude after an awful start and I thought we were very unlucky not to come away with something."

Peter Maguire had deservedly pulled back a goal with 15 minutes to go when he beat the onrushing Gardiner to a throughball from McKay. The same player had a good chance to equalise a few minutes later, but shot over and then home sub Mark Gray headed off the line in injury time.

McHardy believed that Ian Polworth's opportunity to equalise in the 80th minute would have seen his side go on to collect full points, but the ex-Don hesitated after taking up a great position.

Although Huntly were far from convincing, they are still well clear of their main rivals, Keith and Lossiemouth, two teams they still have to play.

HUNTLY — Gardiner, Yeats, Allan (Shinnie), Lennox, Paterson, Moreland, Brown (Gray), Stewart, Selbie, Whyte, Scott (Smith).

ELGIN CITY — Grigor, Dunsire, Cameron, McLennan, Moir, McHardy, Whyte, MacDonald (McKay), Polworth, Green (Ord), Maguire.

Charles booster for Cove

FORT WILLIAM 0
COVE RANGERS 5

VETERAN keeper Ray Charles has given Cove boss Dave Cormie the answer he wanted to hear over his long-term future at Allan Park.

On Saturday, against Fort William, the former East Fife keeper played his first full 90 minutes in the Press and Journal Highland League since he broke his ankle last May. And manager Cormie was delighted with his performance, saying: "Having Ray Charles back in the side was like having a new signing anchoring the defence.

"Fort William posed us fewer problems than I feared they might, but Ray's organisational ability and his experience stood out over the course of the game.

"Now that he's got that first full game out of the way, we'll play him at every opportunity, because I'm certain we would have lost far fewer games this season if he hadn't been out injured for so long."

Two goals in the three minutes from Michael Beattie and Alan Leslie midway through the first half and a second counter for Beattie a minute before the break put Cove 3-0 up and in the driving seat at half-time.

And they picked up where they left off in the second half with Beattie completing his hat-trick, taking him to 29 goals for the season, and trialist Greg Milnes rounding off a five-goal canter.

Change in air, says Clach boss

CLACHNACUDDIN 2
DEVERONVALE 1

by **Bob Mackinnon**

CLACHNACUDDIN made heavy weather of what should have been an easy victory and manager Roshie Fraser plans to make changes for Wednesday night's home game against league leaders Huntly.

Darren MacLachlan is unavailable and Alan MacDonald is doubtful due to work commitments, but replacements for them may only be part of a freshening up process for the Lilywhites.

Fraser said: "While I was very happy to see us get full points against Deveronvale, I felt that we should have won a lot more convincingly.

"We missed a number of good scoring chances and became sloppy in our defending late in the game.

Power

"We won't get away with doing that sort of thing against Huntly and I will be giving a lot of thought to how we can combat their aerial power."

He added: "Huntly, it seems, are now back to their best, but a win is certainly not beyond us. We have a very good home league record, having lost only once in our last 11 games at Grant Street Park."

Despite playing into a very strong wind in the first half, Clach always had the upper hand and Vale goalkeeper Ian Grant came to his team's rescue with a string of excellent saves.

Grant denied good efforts from Norman MacMillan and Dave Brennan before brilliantly tipping over a scorching drive from Jamie Macpherson on the stroke of half-time.

Macpherson broke the deadlock when he raced through a static defence in the opening minute of the second half.

Bruce McCraw stretched the lead with a superbly judged lob, but Clach were still congratulating themselves when Andy Heggie reduced the defecit with a looping header from Steve Dolan's cross.

Renewed

That goal gave Vale renewed hope and although they had the bulk of play from there on they never really troubled a rather shaky looking Clach defence.

Deveronvale coach Brian Stewart, who was deputising for manager Alan Scott, said: "It was a disappointing performance from our point of view. When we did get on top late in the game we failed to create any worthwhile chances, because far too many passes went astray."

CLACHNACUDDIN — Munro, Brennan, Murray, Dearie (Russell), Sinclair, Skinner, MacLachlan, MacDonald, Macpherson, McCraw, MacMillan (Corbett).

DEVERONVALE — Grant, Will, Scott (Morrison), Rattray, Henderson, Humphries, Christie, Simmers, Heggie, McGinlay, Dolan.

McBeath blasts players

ROTHES 3
BRORA RANGERS............ 3

SPEYSIDERS boss Graham McBeath and opposite number John Suttar both dished out a tongue-lashing to their sides after a six-goal stalemate at Mackessack Park.

The Rothes boss gave his players little credit for a 15-minute three-goal second-half fightback, while Suttar savaged his team, which finished the game two men short, for throwing away a three-goal lead. Midfield man James Winter fired Brora ahead in 49 minutes and a Kevin Morris double, which took the big welder to 19 goals for the season, should have had the game won for Brora.

Keeper Michael Gray saved Ricky Thomson's penalty, but Chris Pilichos hauled the Speysiders back into the game in 77 minutes and he grabbed the equaliser five minutes from time after Lee O'Brien made it 3-2 with the second penalty of the game.

Brora finished the game with winger Steve Murray and sweeper Jimmy Anderson, who has just completed a five-game suspension, in the bath early after they picked up two bookings each and automatic red cards.

Keith sparkle as Broch flop

FRASERBURGH 0
KEITH............................. 1

by **Dave Edwards**

FRASERBURGH looked a shadow of the team who beat Huntly in the Aberdeenshire Cup last week, creating only a couple of half chances late on in the game.

Keith were well organised at the back and man-of-the-match Scott Taylor looked dangerous throughout and might have added to his 18th-minute goal.

That goal stunned the fervent home fans. Taylor received the ball wide on the left and, with the wind at his back, floated a beauty high over Billy Gordon.

Derek Nicol squandered a couple of chances as Keith went looking to add to their tally, but only a Kris Hunter effort, which was brilliantly blocked by Keith keeper Ian Thain, gave the home fans anything to shout about.

Keith again had management duo Martin Allan and Alan Lyons in their starting line-up, although the latter only lasted an eventful 35 minutes, before limping off, having already picked up a yellow card along with teammate Ian Robertson for disputing a decision by referee Sandy Roy, who, incidentally, handled the game superbly.

Keith assistant manager Lyons was in buoyant mood after the game, however, saying that: "We knew it was always going to be a hard game, but the players responded well and our defence were outstanding. The match itself wasn't very pretty to watch, but it's the result that counts."

Broch assistant manager Bruce Buchan was forthright in his comments: "We never played in the first half and the score was just about right. We only created something late on, but we snatched at the ball in front of goal, we needed someone with a bit of composure to stick it in the net."

The Broch will be looking for a distinct improvement when they take on champions Huntly in the league at Bellslea next Saturday.

FRASERBURGH — Gordon, Young, Michie (Summers), Clark, Stephen, McBride, Killoh (Thomson), Murray, Keith, Hunter, Norris (McCafferty).

KEITH — Thain, Morrison, Lyons (Brown), Robertson, Taylor, Gibson, McPherson, Taylor, Allan (McGachie), Nicol, Wilson.

Lossie chase a double target

LOSSIEMOUTH................. 3
BUCKIE THISTLE............. 0

CONFIDENT Lossiemouth are looking to hit the heights on both the league and North Cup fronts over the next fortnight after a comfortable 3-0 home win over Buckie Thistle at Grant Park.

On Saturday week the Coasters bid to chalk up a third successive North Cup triumph, but assistant manager Mike Cormack's eye is firmly on this weekend's league fixtures.

Lossie head for Borough Briggs and a derby clash with Elgin City, while defending champions and title favourites Huntly face their bogey side Fraserburgh at Bellslea.

"Next Saturday's league fixtures could do wonders for our title challenge, especially if we beat City and Broch turn Huntly over again, because that would really set us up for the North Cup final and the championship run-in," said Cormack.

Second-half goals from Gary Clark, Charlie Rowley and Andy Walker saw off Buckie Thistle after the Jags made a good fist of Saturday's first-half at windy Grant Park to keep the match goalless at half-time.

Livewire Clark had a hand in both of his teammates' goals, setting up Rowley with a brilliant throughball and then handing Walker the simplest of chances after a run which ripped apart the Jags defence.

Cormack added: "Gary responded well to a real tongue-lashing from Fraser Kellas, along with the rest of the lads, at half-time. We never looked like losing, but our first-half performance was below par."

Jags No. 2 Robbie Nicol pointed to Lossie's fitness edge as the decisive factor in the second half, but he has doubts about the Coasters' chances of beating Huntly to the title.

He said: "We went into the game with a few players, notably Malcolm Murray and Paul D'Arcy, carrying injuries and that told in the second half, because Lossie stepped up a gear and we couldn't match them.

"Even so, I can't see Lossie edging Huntly out for the championship."

Peterhead all set for final

PETERHEAD 7
NAIRN COUNTY 0

PETERHEAD and Fraserburgh will learn where they are to contest the Jarlaw Aberdeenshire Cup final when the Aberdeenshire FA management committee meets tomorrow night.

The two Buchan clubs favour the toss of a coin to choose between Bellslea and Recreation Park, but association officials look likely to insist that the Saturday, March 29, clash goes to a neutral venue.

Peterhead boss Dave Watson said: "If that's the case, both clubs are likely to opt for Kynoch Park. Huntly are under pressure from the sheer weight of their remaining fixtures to protect their pitch, effectively ruling Christie Park out.

"Deveronvale still have finishing work going on in their new stand, which means the game can't go to Princess Royal Park and neither we nor Fraserburgh would be keen on going back to Allan Park, because the shield final was played there in November."

The Blue Tooners extended their unbeaten run to 13 games — 11 wins and two draws — on Saturday with a 7-0 demolition of managerless Nairn County.

Peterhead hit five goals in a one-way first half and finished the 90 minutes with a Colin Milne hat-trick, two goals from youngster Mark Buchan and one apiece from playmaker Scott Brown and Paul McKenzie to show for their total dominance of proceedings.

"It was seven going on 17, because we missed twice as many chances as we took," said a well-satisfied Watson.

"Basically it was another three points and a big kick in the goals for column which kept us in second place behind Huntly in the league table and kept us on the boil for the Aberdeenshire Cup final at the end of the month."

Nairn, who ended manager Harry McFadden five-year tenure at Station Park in midweek, are expected to advertise their management vacancy sometime this week.

McFadden's erstwhile assistant Jimmy Walker, who has taken interim charge, could not be contacted yesterday, but he is understood to be on the point of confirming he will not be in contention for the job.

How they stand

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pt
Huntly	21	16	4	1	65	20	52
Peterhead	25	14	6	5	62	26	48
Keith	23	15	3	5	56	29	48
Lossiemth	22	14	4	4	50	19	46
Cove Ran	22	13	3	6	71	33	42
Devrnvale	24	12	2	10	46	47	38
Fraserbgh	23	10	7	6	42	27	37
Elgin City	23	11	4	8	54	51	37
Clach	21	9	4	8	35	38	31
Rothes	25	7	7	11	31	47	28
Wick Acad	23	6	5	12	30	39	23
Buckie Th	22	6	3	13	27	36	21
Forres Mec	21	5	4	12	29	41	19
Brora Ran	23	3	9	11	36	65	18
Nairn Co	21	4	1	16	18	70	13
Ft William	21	1	2	18	24	88	5

● FIXTURES involving Press and Journal Highland League clubs this week:

TONIGHT (8.0)

JARLAW ABERDEENSHIRE LEAGUE — Buckie Thistle A v Fraserburgh A (J. Campbell, Lossiemouth).

WEDNESDAY (7.30)

PRESS AND JOURNAL HIGHLAND LEAGUE — Buckie Thistle v Nairn County (M. Ritchie, Macduff), Clachnacuddin v Huntly (W. Murray, Evanton) (8.0), Forres Mechanics v Fort Williams (K. Bisset, Inverness).

SATURDAY (3.0)

McEWAN'S LAGER NORTH CUP — Semi-final (replay): Forres Mechanices v Wick Academy (W. Murray, Evanton).

PRESS AND JOURNAL HIGHLAND LEAGUE — Brora Rangers v Nairn County (K. Hadden, Keith), Deveronvale v Peterhead (P. Watson, Mosstodloch), Elgin City v Lossiemouth (G. Middleton, (Aberdeen), Fort William v Buckie Thistle (W. Robertson, Inverness), Fraserburgh v Huntly (B. Christie, Aberdeen), Keith v Clachnacuddin (S. Robertson, Aberdeen), Rothes v Cove Rangers (M. Ritchie, Macduff).

● LEADING North scorers:

34 — Stewart (Huntly).
29 — Beattie (Cove Rangers).
21 — Whyte (Huntly).
19 — Morris (Brora Rangers).
17 — MacRonald (Cove Rangers).
16 — Polworth (Elgin City), **Clark** (Lossiemouth).
15 — McCraw (Clachnacuddin), **Hunter, Keith** (both Fraserburgh), **Nicol** (Keith), **Milne** (Peterhead).

JUNIOR FOOTBALL

Late burst enough to keep Locos on the right track

by **Dave Macdermid**

INVERURIE LOCOS were shocked early on at Buckie Rovers when Mark Pennie gave the home side the lead in their Great Northern Trophies Regional Cup third-round clash.

Jim Findlay levelled for the Harlaw Park side before the break and further goals followed late in the second half courtesy of George Reid and Ally Reid.

Mark Lavelle's brace after the interval saw Turriff United go through by a 3-1 scoreline at Formartine United. Ross McLean had earlier given the visitors an advantage which was cancelled out by Bob Paterson.

A slip from Lewis United keeper Tony Buckley allowed Bon Accord's Dave Caldwell to head home the only goal of the game at the Chris Anderson Stadium, Aberdeen.

A second-half double from Sunnybank's Gordon Troup saw the Heathreyfold team end the hopes of Longside.

East End required extra time before squeezing past Scone Thistle by the odd goal in five away from home in the Dundee North End Centenary Trophy.

Jonathan Clark was the hero for the New Advocates side, bagging all three.

Two goals from Gareth Roberts, both penalties, and strikes by Paul Bathgate and Baldur Bett were enough to give Hermes victory in the Archibald Cup at Fraserburgh United. Remarkably the home team also scored with spot kicks via Dave Allan and James Strachan.

Second-half strikes from George Scott, Gordon Davidson and Donald Ritchie gave Hall Russell United an excellent win at FC Stoneywood in the Aberdeen Cable TV Cup after the home team had nosed in front through Phil Leslie. Banks o' Dee and Lads' Club will have to meet again following a six-goal thriller in the second round of the Gordon Campbell Construction Trophy.

Ryan Petrie, Warren Robertson and Steve Milne were on target for the Spain Park side with Steve Murray and Neil Morrison (2) replying.

In the Evening Express Bon Accord Premier Division, Kevin Lovie opened the scoring for Culter, who went on to win 3-1 at Banchory St Ternan.

A Jim Cruse treble, with Alan Chalmers also finding the net, was enough to see Buchanhaven Hearts win 4-2 at Dyce in the First Division. Cruden Bay had Neil Barbi on the scoresheet in their 2-1 win at Maud, who replied thanks to an Ian Davidson shot.

At yesterday's monthly disciplinary meeting Hermes manager Peter Freeland was fined £25 and severely censured.

The following punishments were handed out to players:

Orderings off — E. Duncan (Deveronside) fined £20 and banned for six games; A. Strachan (Maud) £15 and four games; J. Simpson (Lads' Club), W. Mackay, B. Greig (both Formartine United), I. Mair (Kinloss), S. Parkinson (Parkvale) all £15 and two games. A. Strachan (Maud) £10 fine.

The following players were fined £10 for accumulated cautionary points:

I. Abernethy (Banchory St Ternan), J. Chalmers, G. Webster, J. Morrison (all Buchanhaven Hearts), B. Paterson (Formartine United), E. West (Fraserburgh United), R. Brown (Hall Russell Utd), C. Sim (Inverurie Juniors), S. McKenzie (Lads' Club), I. Fraser, S. Valentine (both Longside), I. Mathieson (Stonehaven), K. Hendry, M. Laing, M. Taylor (all Islavale), D. Main (Nairn St Ninian), K. McDermott (Portgordon United).

In the only Scotscoup League game Deveronside beat Nairn St Ninian 2-1.

FIXTURES
SATURDAY (2.30)

GORDON WILLIAMSON CUP — Second round: Nairn St Ninian v RAF Lossiemouth (A. Macleod), Lossiemouth United v Buckie Rovers (P. Warmington).

STEWART MEMORIAL TROPHY — Second round: Kinloss v Islavale (J. Campbell), Bishopmill United v New Elgin (D. Thewliss).

SCOTSCOUP LEAGUE — Burghead Thistle v Deveronside (G. Cameron), Portgordon United v Forres Thistle (K. Simpson), Strathspey Thistle v Fochabers (S. Macdonald).

Press and Journal TOMORROW **Football** Liverpool v Newcastle – Report, pictures