Huntly turn on style as players back boss

HUNTLY 2
KEITH 0

by **Ritchie McNab**

HUNTLY captain and longest-serving player Eddie Copland has come out in defence of manager Doug Rougvie, who has been the subject of criticism from want-away striker Brian Thomson.

Said Copland: "On behalf of the players I would like to set the record straight that the comments made over the past few days about the manager are the views of one person and not the views of the players.

"To say that there is unrest and little or no harmony in the dressing-room is nothing short of rubbish. There is still the same dressing-room banter as there was when Steve Paterson was in charge and nothing has changed. It is ridiculous for anyone to claim it has.

"Sure our form has not been as consistent as we would have liked, but that is just part of the game and everyone is disappointed at missing out in the Qualifying Cup and with it a place in the Scottish Cup, but the buck stops with the players and we aim to put that right in the months ahead."

Saturday's performance by the reigning champions certainly gave no indication of any internal strife as they simply swept away the challenge of near-neighbours and championship contenders Keith with almost nonchalant ease.

The Christie Park side delighted their followers with their best performance of the season and at the end of the day it took an inspired display from Keith's custodian Ian Thain to keep the scoreline within the realms of respectability.

With Arthur Murphy, Copland and Alan Selbie all sidelined manager Rougvie blooded 16-year-old Bankhead schoolboy Ross Tokely and 17-year-old New Elgin youngster Mike Newlands and both responded to the challenge in the best possible way.

Tokely took the man-of-the-match award, while Newlands' reward was a new two-year contract that brought a grin of satisfaction from the Huntly manager.

But Rougvie's day of joy was almost complete when long-term injury victim Steve Lennox announced he is fit and raring to go. He will make his comeback in the Aberdeenshire League fixture against Deveronvale tonight.

If the classy midfielder comes through unscathed he could well be in contention for a place in Saturday's game with Forres Mechanics.

After a period of intense pressure stand-in skipper Craig Yeats put the champions ahead in 16 minutes when his fierce low drive cannoned off a defender, leaving Thain helpless.

But Yeats didn't require any form of help when he increased his side's lead in 69 minutes, with a delightful header from a Steve Gray cross.

A relieved Rougvie said: "In the wake of the publicity surrounding the club, and particularly me, the players have responded brilliantly and the way they performed today certainly made me a proud man.

"But the icing on the cake was the way that the two teenagers applied themselves. Facing such formidable opponents as Martin Allan and Neil Gibson can be a daunting task for even the most experienced of players, but the pair came through with flying colours."

A bitterly disappointed Keith manager Jim Hamilton said: "We were well and truly mauled and the scoreline was in no way a reflection of the difference between the sides. It was, without doubt, one of the worst performances by a Keith side in my time as manager."

HUNTLY — Gardiner, Newlands, Allan, Tokely, Rougvie, Morland, Gray, Stewart, Yeats, Whyte, De Barros.

KEITH — Thain, Watt, Wilson, Collie, Singer, Gibson, Thomson, Taylor (Woolley), Lavelle (Nicol), Will, Allan (McPherson).

Rothes give it away again

ELGIN CITY 4
ROTHES 3

FOLLOWING Rothes these days would seem to guarantee plenty of goals, but probably too many in their own net for comfort.

The Speysiders are only six short of their final tally for the whole of last season, but are still near the foot of the table — due to an over-generous defence.

Their close season signing Charlie Rowley is producing the goods, but sees his and his fellow strikers' good work undone by conceding too many goals, much to their manager's frustration.

"We seem to be gifting teams an awful lot of early Christmas presents this year," said Graeme Scott.

"One thing we have got this year is a lot of goals for us, but we are still conceding too many goals for my liking which is frustrating.

"But I'm not too despondent, as we played really well on Saturday and deserved to take something out of the game as we had Elgin under the cosh for the last 20 minutes or so," he said.

In a real thriller at Borough Briggs, Rothes went a goal up through Rowley in the first minute, before giving away an equaliser straight away through John Mutch.

Elgin went ahead for the first time in 20 minutes when Duncan Ord scored, but Ricky Thomson pulled the visitors level again six minutes later.

It was curtains for Rothes before half-time when Russell MacKay and Paul McHardy scored to put the Black and Whites in the driving seat.

Rothes hit them with everything after the break, but only had a late Tolga Dagtas counter to show for their efforts.

Nairn can look forward to much brighter future

County get off rock bottom

NAIRN COUNTY 2
CLACHNACUDDIN 1

by **Alan Simpson**

NAIRN COUNTY finally delivered what they had threatened for several weeks by ruining Norman MacMillan's debut and snatching 3pt.

County fully deserved only their third league win of the season as they caught Clachnacuddin half asleep and never looked like letting them waken up.

After the trials of last season, County seemed to have emerged from a long, dark tunnel with a series of good performances without getting the results.

On Saturday, the result finally came to match the performance and plunged Clach into the mouth of the same tunnel from which Nairn have just emerged.

"Our next game will show just how far we have come this season," said County boss Harry McFadden.

The game McFadden refers to is a return trip to Cove with revenge high on the agenda as they try to wipe out probably their darkest hour.

In the corresponding fixture last season County were walloped 14-1 by the Aberdeen club and the bad press they received afterwards still rankles at Station Park.

"Some people, who really should have known better after being involved in Highland football, said some shocking things after that game and that still annoys me," said McFadden.

Produced

"We produced an absoloutely shocking performance that day and it is to the credit of everyone at the club that they have responded so well.

"We had a really good start to the season before the one-off performance against Deveronvale set us back a bit, but the players responded well again."

In surroundings that can sometimes fail to inspire just by their very nature, Clach produced a performance they would wish to forget.

They never looked like slipping into the fast, flowing football they have been capable of producing this season as they surged up the table.

Unfortunately for the Lilywhites, their champagne style of football has all gone a bit flat recently and not even a big-money striker could replace the missing fizz.

Clach were missing some key players, but manager Roshie Fraser refused to use that as an excuse for such a poor performance.

Bad day

"It was just a bad day and we are in a bit of a rut at the moment which we have to get out of quickly.

"We are missing some experienced players, but that shouldn't be used as an excuse for that performance. The boys can rest assured they will be worked very hard this week," added Fraser.

Clach never really recovered from conceding a first minute penalty which Neil Sinclair converted to put the wind in County's sails.

They turned level at half-time thanks to a well-worked Mark Holmes goal after some tigerish play down the flank by Bruce McCraw.

County's winner was a beauty and belied their lowly position when substitute Alan MacDonald finished off a great four-man move when he slammed in a cross from the ubiquitious Ronnie Sharp.

Sharp perhaps didn't have his best game for County, but when he did feel the urge to get involved some of his touches were quite sublime.

In these days of emphasis on midfield engines and hammer throwers on our parks it's good to see traditional midfield silk alive and well at Station Park.

NAIRN COUNTY — Ritchie, Clark, Miller, Bell, Forbes, Cameron, Brooks, Sanderson, Davidson, Sharp, Sinclair.

CLACHNACUDDIN — Munro, Stone, Murray, MacKay, MacLeod, Deane, MacLachlan, Holmes, Thomson, McCraw, MacMillan.

■ **Net result . . . Clach's Mark Holmes slots the ball past helpless Nairn goalkeeper Ritchie for the Inverness club's goal at Station Park on Saturday.**

■ **On the run . . . Nairn's Ronnie Sharp sets off with Clach's Norman Thomson in hot pursuit.**

Make or break for Blue Toon

PETERHEAD 5
FORRES MECHANICS 2

PETERHEAD kept their title dreams alive with a comprehensive victory over Forres in a game full of controversy.

The Can-Cans' Darren MacLean received his marching orders just before half-time, following an off-the-ball clash with Doug Baxter.

The incident turned the game and ended any chance Forres had of turning their recent good form into another victory.

Instead they lost their four-match unbeaten run and to cap a miserable day Nairn's home victory sent them back to the bottom of the table.

Can-Cans boss George Cowie was fuming after the game, but refused to be drawn into making any comment on the incident, or the match in general.

"I am not happy with being back at the bottom of the league, but I am not saying any more than that," was his only comment.

Cowie's fury was understandable as his team seemed to crumble after losing MacLean.

Peterhead capitalised immediately and Bruce Campbell added a quickfire double just before half-time that sunk the Can-Cans.

Forres briefly rallied after Kevin Walker reduced the deficit, but Peterhead hit back again with Baxter (2) and Derek Smith ending hopes of a comeback.

Kevin Walker's late counter was a case of too little, too late for Forres and they ended up well beaten on the day.

Peterhead's win keeps the pressure on at the top and they now face a critical series of fixtures that could make or break their challenge.

They have now gone 10 matches undefeated and will face up to near-neighbours Fraserburgh tomorrow night in the Jarlaw Aberdeenshire Shield final full of confidence.

Lossie are in the mood to chase double glory

BRORA RANGERS 1
LOSSIEMOUTH 2

LOSSIEMOUTH are quietly building up a head of steam they hope to sustain all the way into the forthcoming Scottish Cup game against Forfar.

The Coasters started the season with a chronic goalscoring problem. That problem seems to have been cured and now complements one of the league's meanest defences.

Even the setback of Qualifying Cup semi-final defeat against Fraserburgh has failed to seriously effect the momentum Lossie have gathered recently.

"It was an awful way to lose in the cup and the lads were all down about it afterwards, especially after having the chance to win it at home," said Lossie boss Fraser Kellas.

"They have responded really well and showed a lot of character in the way they have bounced back.

"I'm not going to say we are going to win the league or anything, but if we are still there at the start of the year we will try and instil into the players that maybe we could do it.

"As for the Scottish Cup game, Forfar seemed to have slipped up recently and we will look to continue winning and gain the psychological edge."

Lossie won again on Saturday with goals by Darren Still and Ian Shaw that cancelled out an opener from Lee MacDougall for Brora.

Lossie are now up to fourth place in the league, although a distant 10pt behind leaders Huntly.

But they are tucked in nicely and face an important set of fixtures against some of the other challengers that could see a serious Grant Park title surge.

Brora boss Jim Kelly was philosophical in defeat and remained upbeat despite the defeat.

"We played well and perhaps we could have got something out of the game, but in the end we have no real grumbles.

"We are playing much better at the moment and it was one of those games that could have gone either way," said Kelly.

Highland hitmen

LEADING Press and Journal Highland League scorers:

19 — **Hunter** (Fraserburgh).
16 — **Yeats** (Huntly).
15 — **Bridgeford** (Peterhead).
12 — **Whyte** (Huntly).
11 — **Wolecki** (Deveronvale), **Duff** (Wick Academy).
10 — **McCraw** (Clach), **Polworth** (Elgin City).
9 — **Beattie** (Cove Rangers), **Thomson** (Huntly), **S. Taylor** (Keith), **Moir** (Fort William), **Rowley** (Rothes).
8 — **S. Taylor** (Keith), **Will** (Keith), **I. MacDougall** (Brora Rangers), **McCredie** (Peterhead), **Yule** (Peterhead), **Megginson** (Cove Rangers), **Leslie** (Cove Rangers), **Shaw** (Lossiemouth), **Murray** (Wick Academy).

Highland fixtures and table

FIXTURES involving Press and Journal Highland League teams this week:

TONIGHT (8.0)

ABERDEENSHIRE LEAGUE — Buckie Thistle A v Cove Rangers A (J. Gover, Aberdeen), Deveronvale A v Huntly A (G. Middleton, Aberdeen).

TOMORROW (8.0)

JARLAW ABERDEENSHIRE SHIELD — Final: Fraserburgh v Peterhead (M. Pocock, Aberdeen), at Christie Park, Huntly.

SATURDAY (3.0)

PRESS AND JOURNAL HIGHLAND LEAGUE — Buckie Thistle v Elgin City (M. Pocock, Aberdeen), Clach v Rothes (I. Brines, Forres), Cove Rangers v Nairn County (E. Robertson, Inverness), Deveronvale v Fort William (R. Cobb, Aberdeen), Forres Mechanics v Huntly (G. Middleton, Aberdeen), Keith v Fraserburgh (T. Greer, Aberdeen), Lossiemouth v Wick Academy (K. Bisset, Inverness), Peterhead v Brora Rangers (J. Gover, Aberdeen).

PRESS & JOURNAL HIGHLAND LEAGUE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pt
Huntly	13	11	0	2	44	19	33
Cove Ran	13	9	2	2	32	14	29
Peterhead	14	8	4	2	40	24	28
Lossiemth	12	7	2	3	22	13	23
Elgin City	12	7	0	5	28	25	21
Wick Acad	13	6	3	4	22	25	21
Keith	11	6	2	3	24	16	20
Fraserbgh	10	6	1	3	39	25	19
Brora Ran	12	5	2	5	18	19	17
Devrnvale	14	5	1	8	25	30	16
Clach	14	4	2	8	21	25	14
Ft William	13	4	1	8	15	26	13
Buckie Th	14	3	3	8	23	38	12
Rothes	13	3	1	9	23	37	10
Nairn Co	12	3	0	9	14	36	9
Forres Mec	14	1	4	9	11	29	7

Seven-up Broch march on

FRASERBURGH 7
BUCKIE THISTLE 2

FRASERBURGH warmed up nicely for tomorrow's cup final against Peterhead as they went seven-up against a side who needed this result like a hole in the head.

Broch were stung into action after conceding two early goals to finally romp home against a Buckie side who don't have their problems to seek.

Kris Hunter rediscovered his scoring touch with four quality goals that keeps the Broch in there challenging in the Press and Journal Highland League title chase and the smile on his manager's face.

"I am absoloutely delighted with the result as I would have just as easily taken a 1-0 win," said Fraserburgh boss Charlie Duncan.

"When you are 2-0 down at 10 past three you wonder what on earth is going on, but to come back before half-time was just tremendous.

"I feel sorry for Buckie as I felt the scoreline was not a true reflection on the game and it could really have gone either way for a while.

"I always knew we could raise our game against the big guns, but now we are doing it every week and we will just try to keep winning and see what happens."

Fraserburgh are on an awesome run at the moment and could just have gathered enough momentumn to become serious challengers come the season's end.

There is no doubt that by getting rid of the Qualifying Cup monkey off their back, the Broch babes have gained a huge psychological lift.

At present they are playing with a confidence and maturity not seen at Bellslea for a while and eyebrows will be raised all across the Highland League.

With another cup-final date in the Jarlaw Aberdeenshire Shield tomorrow, everything in the Bellslea garden seems to be rosy.

For Buckie the only way forward seems to be by the long, hard route as they bid to get back on the rails.

Manager Bob Summers would not comment after the match on the players' performance, but did suggest that some may have to lift their performance levels.

Mark Girling with an own goal, Jimmy Young and Scott Clark were the other Broch scorers with Paul D'Arcy and Iain Bruce replying for the Jags.

On song Wick warm to life at top

WICK ACADEMY 2
DEVERONVALE 1

WICK made it nine games unbeaten with a win against injury-hit Deveronvale that sees the Caithness side move in menancingly behind the leaders.

After a dreadful start to the season, that saw the newest Press and Journal Highland League club look like they would rather be anywhere else but where they found themselves, the turnaround has been quite remarkable.

Backed by one of the noisiest and biggest crowds in the league, Wick are now beginning to realise their potential.

With one team-of-the-month award already heading up to Caithness, few would bet against another one or two being pinned up in the new-look boardroom.

No one at the club is getting carried away, as a few defeats could easily send the club spinning down the table and undo the good work.

But Wick have one of the most potent strikeforces in the league in Alan Duff and Alan Murray and things are looking rosy in among the Caithness peat.

Murray helped himself to another goal at the weekend with Gordon McDonald adding the other.

Craig Stewart scored a consolation for Vale as their season goes in the opposite direction to that of their opponents.

With a Scottish Cup game coming up next week and an injury list longer than the road to Cliftonhill, manager Alan Scott is far from despondent.

"I am not disappointed with the way we played as we could have got something out of the game in the end," he said.

"We will just have to see how many players we have available for the cup game against Albion Rovers, but Steven Rattray played on Saturday.

"Eddie Wolecki and Andrew Heggie will probably miss next week's game, but they might make the cup-tie. I could be looking at getting three or four players back for the game," said Scott.

Scott hopes to complete a signing to boost his ailing squad this week.

Press and Journal

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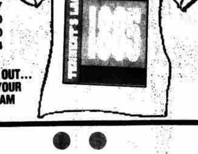
Highland TENNENT'S LAGER League

LUCKY NUMBERS GAME

THIS WEEK'S WINNERS

Brora Rangers v. Lossiemouth 2425
Elgin City v. Rothes 22876
Fraserburgh v. Buckie Thistle 29905
Huntly v. Keith 37897
Nairn County v. Clachnacuddin 48640
Peterhead v. Forres Mechanics 51740
Wick Academy v. Deveronvale 56974

Press and Journal HIGHLAND LEAGUE

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