

# Speedway – Berwick boss praises team effort despite defeat

Berwick Bandits head for Poole on Wednesday after their 51-39 defeat at Plymouth Gladiators at the start of their Southern Tour, **writes Lawrence Heppell.**

Bandits started well as Nikolaj Busk Jakobsen and his Berwick partner Leon Flint (pictured) hit the front from fast gates in Heat One. However, Richard Lawson, the Gladiators' guest number one flew round Flint off bend two with Flint holding Zack Cook at the rear 'till the final lap when the Plymouth man whipped past on the back straight to share the race, 3-3.

The home side took a big advantage in the second race as reserve pairing Jason Edwards and Alfie Bowtel hit the front, and despite Flint plugging away at Bowtel from behind all race, the Gladiators recorded a 5-1 to go 8-4 ahead. Jye Etheridge and Dany Gappmaier found no trouble in reversing that maximum in Heat Three who took the five easily from Dillon Ruml and Steven Goret, two newcomers to the UK scene in 2021 to tie the match again 9-9.

Aaron Summers made the perfect skipper's start to the night winning Heat Four from the gate for the visitors, keeping home star, Bjarne Pedersen at bay with Kyle Bickley relegating Edwards at the rear in a Bandits' 2-4 that put Berwick into a two-point lead, 11-13. The 5th wasn't so great for Berwick as Busk Jakobsen lifted in front of the two Plymouth riders and ended up engulfed in the air fence with his exclusion from the re-run in which the remaining Bandit, Flint who rode a superb race to hold a determined Goret in second to win and limit damage by winning a 3-3.

Summers beat Lawson by a huge margin in the sixth, celebrating

loudly as the crossed the winning post, and with Bickley holding Cook at the rear, the Bandits' 2-4 doubled their lead to 16-20, and in Heat Seven Pedersen made the gate only for Etheridge to open his throttle wide off the second bend and soar round the Dane in impressive style to again share the heat, and maintain Berwick's four-point lead 19-23.

Cook found his form in the eighth as he gated to lead with Bowtel in tow, but Gappmaier was all over the back of the Gladiator, passing him at the start of the second lap while Flint tried hard to join his Bandits' partner, missing out on the last lap in a 4-2 that halved Berwick's lead once again at 23-25. Heat 10 was nearly an exclusion for Gappmaier, when his bike blew on the run to the start line, and he just jumped on Flint's bike in time to beat the two-minute warning only for Cook to jump-start causing the referee to call it back for an all-four restart.

In the re-run Lawson found it easy to win from the gate, but Etheridge and Gappmaier tucked into second and third to again share the race, the score now 29-31 with five races left to run, and the Bandits then went on to restore the four-point lead in Heat 11's 2-4, which started out a 1-5 until Pedersen passed Bickley on the third lap. Etheridge fell into the first bend fence in Heat 12, narrowly avoided by Edwards, but all four were called back, although the Bandit limping with a painful leg. In the re-run Bowtel and Edwards both passed Etheridge off bend to to form an unassailable 5-1 levelling the match 36-36 with three to go.

Pedersen and Lawson gated over Busk Jakobsen and Summers in the vital Heat 13 and held the five points to the flag despite some hard challenging from the Bandits' duo, as the Gladiators won a four-point lead of their own, 41-37, Berwick losing their grip on the match, which was completely dropped in Heat 14's home maximum from Bowtel and Ruml flew from the gate, leaving Gappmaier and Bickley floundering behind, although Gappmaier did challenge Ruml later in the race, but the 5-1

ended the Bandits' challenge with the score now 46-38 with one heat to run, and that took three attempt to run, as both Summers, then Busk Jakobsen went down on the first bend, both called back for an all-four restart, ending in another 5-1 ending the match at a disappointing 51-39 for a battling set of Bandits.

Team manager, Gary Flint said afterwards: "These guys have got an amazing team spirit this year with riders offering bikes to teammates when needed and full support of each other in the pits, and it shows in the effort they put into these meetings that they all desperately want to win and put everything on the line. It seems again to be our finishing skills in a match that are letting us down, which we need to solve quickly, although again over all I can't criticise the effort."

#### Individual Riders' Score Chart:

Plymouth Gladiators: 51

Richard Lawson (guest) 2,2,3,2\*,3 = 12+1

Zack Cook 1\*,0,3,0 = 4+1

Steven Goret 0,2,R,N = 2

Dillon Ruml 1m1\*,N,2\* = 4+2

Bjarne Pedersen 2,2,2,3,2\* = 11+1

Alfie Bowtel 2\*,1\*,1,3,0,3,3 = 13+2

Jason Edwards (guest) 3,0,2\*,N = 5+1

Berwick FTS Bandits: 39

Nikolaj Busk Jakobsen 3,Fx,3,1,1 = 8

Coty Garcia – Rider replacement

Jye Etheridge 3,3,2,1 = 9

Dany Gappmaier 2\*,0,2,1 = 5+2

Aaron Summers 3,3,2,0,0 = 8

Kyle Bickley 0,1,1,1,1,0 = 4

Leon Flint 0,1,3,0,0 = 4