

Speedway – Monarchs earn 18 point lead in KO Cup

What the Fork Monarchs will take an 18 point lead to Birmingham for the second-leg of the Knockout Cup quarter final after a 54-36 first-leg win at Armadale.

Richie Worrall (pictured) returned after injury to claim 14 points and Alex Harkess, team manager, still feels his men could have done better.

He added: “We made some mistakes and let a few points go. I was pleased for Richie Worrall on his return though, I know he was a bit nervous but it felt so good to have him back.”

There was some excellent racing, some of it for race wins (eg Masters v Harris in heat 1, Worrall v Riss in heat 4) but a lot of the most entertaining moments coming lower down the order with clashes between the likes of Anders Rowe and guest Kyle Bickley for Monarchs, and James Shanes, Ashley Morris and guest Jason Edwards for the Brummies.

Masters had to work very hard to subdue Harris in heat 1 after Chris had cut under him down the back straight. With Rowe third Monarchs started with an advantage, adding to that when Kye Thomson and Josh Pickering pulled away from Morris and Shanes in heat 3.

Richie Worrall didn't make the start in his comeback ride in heat 4, but caught Erik Riss on lap two with a well-executed inside pass.

Harris took his team's first race win in heat 6 but Masters and Rowe added another two points to Monarchs' lead in the next one.

Heat 8 was a highlight as Bickley led the way from the

Brummies' Morris and Edwards, only for Rowe to power round the outside, almost taking the lead. Rowe and Bickley rode together for a lap or so without quite sorting themselves out, and eventually Morris pegged back Rowe and very nearly caught Bickley.

There were further home 4-2s in heats 9 and 12, plus a highly entertaining shared race in heat 10, won by Masters by a mile but with Rowe, Shanes and Morris enjoying a great scrap for the other points.

So Monarchs were 14 ahead going in to heat 13, in which a power ride by Worrall and Masters against Harris extended the margin with a 5-1.

Pickering won the penultimate heat but again all eyes for on the battle for the point, a great scrap between Bickley and Edwards which the visitor won. However Bickley's 7 points were a very useful contribution over the piece for Monarchs.

Chris Harris had finished strongly last week with an important second place and he went one better to gate off the outside and storm away for what was his and Birmingham's second race winner.

We had crime writer Ian Rankin in the crowd tonight as guest of match sponsor Dine Restaurant and he had a great time, tweeting "Cracking Night Out" amongst a few other supportive posts. Glad he enjoyed it!