

Bullets just fail to down last-gasp Royals

National Development League: Kent Royals 46, Berwick Bullets 44

Berwick suffered heat 15 heartache for the second time in under 24 hours. Mechanical failure did for the Bandits against Poole Pirates in the SGB Championship on Saturday, it was a fall for Luke Crang which meant that the GHT Bullets travelled home with a solitary point to show for their efforts.

Crang got the nod to partner sensational guest for the day, 15-year-old Jody Scott, to take on the Royals powerful unbeaten spearhead of Alfie Bowtell and Ben Morley, Berwick again needing a second place to claim a draw.

While Scott, who began the year with Oxford Chargers only to break a wrist practicing at King's Lynn, was a shoo-in for the nomination his partner was less clear-cut with skipper Kyle Bickley and another 15-year-old, Ace Pijper also very much in the mind of team manager Jamie Courtney.

His confidence in Crang was initially rewarded as made the start in the first running of the race only to end up in the fence under the challenge of Bowtell.

Referee Simon Humphrey-Kennett allowed all four riders back but at the second time of asking Crang was beaten from the gate by the Royals' pair and then caught out by the heavily watered track, falling on the third bend.

Scott clipped his team-mate's machine and by the time the red lights came on was faced with Morley and Bowtell bearing down on him at speed, the youngster just making the infield to avoid being hit.

Crang, who had remounted by then, was excluded from the re-run and the Kent pairing completed their respective paid maximums and won the meeting for the Royals.

Crang and Scott had conjured up a 5-1 in heat 14 which sent the Bullets into the shootout two points to the good as the visitors clawed their way back into the meeting having trailed by six points after seven heats.

Bowtell lowered his own track record in winning heat one on a scorching hot day, a 5-1 for Pijper and Bickley in heat five giving the visitors their first heat advantage.

A rash move by Blair which saw him end up in the air fence lost Berwick what proved to be a costly point but with Pijper again dominant in heat eight and team-mate Ben Rathbone joining him at the front the table-topping Bullets showed that they were full of fight.

Scott and Blair made it back-back 5-1s either side of a grading break and

Scott, guesting for the injured Kieran Douglas, continued to lead from the front, Mason Watson weighing in with a 4-2 in heat 12 as the visitors knew they were likely to face the Bowtell/Morley axis in three of the last four heats.

With Blair retiring and Bickley pushed into third in 13 it looked bleak until Crang and Scott hit back with the heat 14 heroics to set up the dramatic finale.

“In reality I could have permed any two from Kyle, Luke, Ace and Jody but they had again put a lot of water on the track and Jody had ridden those difficult conditions well all afternoon,” Berwick co-owner and team manager on the day Jamie Courtney explained.

“Luke was confident he could gate on Bowtell and clamp him down, which worked well until he got dumped on his backside in

the first running of heat 15.

“In the end winning is good at National Development League level – and we went there looking for all the points – but I can honestly say that not one rider can be faulted for his efforts on a new track and in unusual conditions.

“We only ran five last places but still lost but I think that everyone comes home have added another piece or two to their development jigsaw.

“So disappointed with the result, happy to give credit to the Kent lads whose top two really did the business but equally happy with the effort and commitment shown by the Bullets on the day.

“As a club we’re as invested in bringing on all seven riders as we are to collecting silverware, even though we’re doing a pretty good job of being successful at both at the moment.

The Bullets remain three points clear of Leicester at the top of the table, albeit the Lion Cubs, who they entertain on July 23 in the KO Cup semi-final, have two meetings in hand.

Royals: Alfie Bowtell 14+1, Joe Alcock R/R, Danno Verge 6, Jamie Halder 4+1, Ben Morley 14+1, Chris Watts 3, Sam Woolley 5+2

Bullets: Kyle Bickley 7+1, Ace Pijper 8+2, Mason Watson 2+1, Luke Crang 8, Greg Blair 3+1, Jody Scott 14+1, Ben Rathbone 2+1.