

Etheridge blow but Knudsen stars for Bandits

SGB Championship: Oxford Cheetahs 40, Berwick Bandits 50

A hand injury suffered by Jye Etheridge was the only disappointment on a night when the FTS Bandits, powered by Keenwood Carpets, graduated with honours.

On their first visit to the university city in over two decades, five riders received firsts ending a Berwick away day drought stretching back to April 2019.

Skipper Chris Harris proved yet again that he has a PhD in track craft and seemed set to a paid-maximum until old sparring partner Scott Nicholls lowered his colours in Heat 15, his 13 points plus one bonus haul matched by the teams "fresher" Jonas Knudsen (pictured).

Etheridge faces another spell on the sidelines after suffering a hand injury and possible broken index finger in an awkward Heat 10 fall.

To cover his absence Belle Vue, have moved to book Knudsen as a guest and the Dane will make his Premiership debut at Ipswich on Thursday.

Aaron Summers top-scored for the Cheetahs against his former club, one of only three Oxford race winners on a night when they were consistently second best.

Bandits' took the chequered flag in the first seven heats as they looked more at home on a track heavily watered to counter the blistering daytime temperatures.

Harris set the ball rolling, partnering Theo Pijper to a heat one 5-1 and even when Etheridge was excluded for touching the tapes in heat three it allowed Knudsen, an impressive victor

in the reserves' race, to double up with another lightning start before Flint became the fourth visitor to race off into the distance.

Harris produced the pass of the night to deny Summers and when Nicholls fell trying to pass Flint the resulting 5-1 with Knudsen forced Oxford to use their tactical substitution in heat seven.

It backfired as Etheridge and Ricky Wells kept Nicholls and the ineffective Troy Batchelor at bay.

Oxford staged a mini revival and finally found a race winner in heat eight as Ruml and Adam Roynon made the gate even though Pijper again showed good speed to split the pairing.

Summers got the better of Flint in nine as Oxford clawed two more points back and they took advantage of the rerun following Etheridge's fall to take a 5-1 after Wells had led the original running.

But Berwick had no intention of letting another lead slip as Harris team-rode Pijper home for an emphatic 5-1 and then Nathan Stoneman held Roynon at bay with Knudsen winning at a canter to all but seal victory.

Which was mathematically achieved when Harris again kept Nicholls and Batchelor behind him in 13 even though Summers stormed to victory in the penultimate heat, roaring through the middle of Wells and Knudsen down the back straight.

Harris seemed on course for a paid maximum as he reached the first bend of heat 15 clear of Nicholls only for referee Graeme Hunter to call the race back even though it was the Cheetah who had moved early.

In the re-run Nicholls got the drop and fended off everything the Berwick skipper threw at him, although there was only half a bike length in it as the two raced off the last bend to the

line.

"I'm super proud of the boys," team manager Gary Flint said. "I feel that a performance like this has been coming for a long while but it's still good to get the points on the board. It was a complete team performance with everyone digging deep and contributing vital points.

"Even when Oxford looked like they might stage something of a comeback then 'Bomber' (Chris Harris) and Theo team-rode to what must have been the oldest aggregate age 5-1 in the history of speedway."

Cheetahs: Scott Nicholls 10, Dillon Ruml 8+2, Paul Starke R/R, Aaron Summers 12, Troy Batchelor 4+1, Cameron Heeps 3, Adam Roynon 3+2

Bandits: Chris Harris 13+1, Theo Pijper 8+1, Jye Etheridge 3, Ricky Wells 4+2, Leon 8, Jonas Knudsen 13+1, Nathan Stoneman 1.