

Harris again leads from front but Bandits fall to pace-setters

SGB Championship: Leicester Lions 55, Berwick Bandits 35

Skipper Chris Harris (picture by Keith Hamblin courtesy of Berwick Bandits) saved the best for last on an evening when the Leicester Lions underlined their superiority with a 55-35 victory over the Borders combine.

Harris, fresh from helping Great Britain qualify for the European Pairs final, produced the race of the night in heat 15 with a trademark inside pass which denied both Kyle Howarth and Richie Worrall maximums.

It was a typical bit of magic from Berwick's No 1 and it was a rare moment to cheer for fans of the FTS Bandits, powered by Keenwood Karpets. Berwick's misfiring middle order was again exposed.

Referee Dave Watters warned Connor Mountain, Max Clegg and Kyle Howarth for moving at the start in the first four heats, but his decision to re-run the heats twice saw the red lights come on with Berwick holding 5-1 positions. On a slick, dusty track passing was at a premium and the visitors felt a little hard done to by those decisions.

Connor Coles, guesting for visa victim Jonas Knudsen, won heat two at a track where he represents the home side in the National Development League, Nathan Stoneman finishing third for what was Berwick's only early heat advantage as they trailed 20-10 after five heats, young Dan Thompson holding Harris at bay after a good tussle.

Leon Flint added to his burgeoning reputation by holding off

guest Richard Lawson to win heat six but Coles slid off after again looking well on the pace.

The visitors kept the deficit at ten points until heat eight when Coles, replacing the out-of-touch Theo Pijper, and Stoneman were on the wrong end of a Lions' 5-1.

Berwick played the tactical substitute in heat nine, Harris and Flint sharing the spoils as Worrall just hung on to pip the hard-charging No 1 on the line, but the Bandits' skipper found himself on the wrong end of a rare 1-5 in 11 when Howarth thwarted his every move to get up and challenge race leader, former Newcastle man Clegg.

Leicester found themselves on the end of a similarly impressive piece of team riding in 13 as Harris and Flint combined to relegate Lawson to fourth place with Howarth off into the distance.

Ricky Wells won heat 14 to ensure a share of the points before Harris' virtuoso heat 15 performance.

Gary Flint, Berwick's team manager, said: "Heat one and heat four in particular we were on 5-1s when the referee stopped the races. To be fair, he explained his reasoning and was consistent, but instead of being ten points up we found ourselves six down. Connor Coles was unbelievable as a guest, while Ricky was ok after his first ride and Nathan never stopped trying.

"Jye still seems to be struggling with the effects of his damaged hand so it was left to Bomber (Chris Harris) and Leon to take the fight to what, after all, is the best team in the league this season.

"Bomber took a while to get dialled in but was sensational in 15 while for Leon it is all good experience to be in heats 13 and 15.

“Points at Leicester were always an outside bet but we now have to make sure that we put it all together against Plymouth, Scunthorpe and Birmingham and there’s the small matter of a visit from Glasgow to take into consideration too.”

Meanwhile, Bullets rider Luke Crang scored 4+1 as a guest for Oxford Chargers who underlined their National Development League play-off credentials by winning 47-42 at Kent.

Lions: Richard Lawson 8, Connor Mountain 6+1, Richie Worrall 13+1, Dan Thompson 6+1, Kyle Howarth 13+1, Max Clegg 6+1, Joe Thompson 3+1.

Bandits: Chris Harris 11, Theo Pijper 0, Jye Etheridge 4+1, Ricky Wells 7, Leon Flint 7+2, Connor Coles 5+1, Nathan Stoneman 1.