

Redcar Bears continue to dominate at Shielfield

Knockout Cup: Berwick Bandits 34, Redcar Bears 56 (aggregate: 73-107)

Berwick suffered a KO Cup nightmare as Redcar made it six in their last seven Shielfield Park visits, writes **George Dodds**.

Any hope the FTS Bandits, powered by Keenwood Karpets, harboured of pulling back a 12-point first leg deficit were in tatters as early as the fourth heat as Redcar added an extra 14 points to their aggregate lead.

Bandits managed to rebuild machinery damaged in a series of heavy crashes at Glasgow Tigers in the Jubilee League on Friday.

While machinery may have been salvaged, it was a different story for bruised and battered manpower with the side already operating rider-replacement for Leon Flint and with ex-Berwick favourite Aaron Summers guesting for Jye Etheridge.

Jonas Knudsen again finished near the top of the Berwick scorechart but the young Dane was suffering from heavy bruising which meant that at times he struggled to walk back to the pits after races.

Berwick needed to hit the ground running. Instead Chris Harris (pictured tangling with Lewis Kerr courtesy of Berwick Bandits and taken by **Taz McDougall**) and Theo Pijper found themselves on the wrong end of a heat one 5-1 inspired by Charles Wright.

Worse followed as the other two parts of Redcar's three-pronged spearhead, Erik Riss and Lewis Kerr led their teammates home for further maximums.

An early home team huddle brought a response from the home

side as only Wright's lunge around the outside of Knudsen prevented him from joining Ricky Wells in a heat five 4-2 and Harris then lowered Kerr's colours to make it a second successive 4-2.

A puncture robbed Summers of an easy third alongside Knudsen before the Dane teamed up with Theo Pijper for Berwick's first – and as it turned out only – maximum heat win of the night in eight.

Summers and Wells shared the spoils behind Kerr as Berwick kept the deficit to eight points and had an outside chance of at least winning on the night.

A hope which was emphatically snuffed out as Redcar ran riot in the closing stages, gaining heat advantages in five of the last six heats, back-to-back 5-1s in 10 and 11 before Wells split the visiting pair in 12, German Erik Riss completing an untroubled maximum in the process, before a dramatic heat 13.

At the first attempt Harris and Kerr tangled spectacularly on the fourth bend, the Berwick rider clipping the back wheel of his opponent and both hit the deck at high speed.

Fortunately, there was no damage but, in the rerun Kerr, already on a warning from the referee, was caught rolling again, Redcar electing to send him from a 15-metre handicap following his exclusion.

He made little impact on Summers but the former Berwick captain's hopes of marking his Shielfield return with a heat win ended when the spectacularly fast Wright wound it on around the polyfoam fence and won the race in style.

Kasper Andersen won heat 14, Wells again splitting the visiting pair, earning the 2021 Bandit a heat 15 nomination in the process alongside Edwards.

Harris again misfired off the start and, by the time his

engine found its beat, he was too far behind the Dane, Wells completing a top-scoring performance as he became the only home rider in double figures.

Redcar provided 11 of the heat winners on a night that even their most loyal fans could barely have dreamed of.

Berwick team manager Gary Flint reflected: "After the highs of Oxford on Wednesday, the last two nights have been pretty horrific results. We were battered and bruised (after Friday at Glasgow) and the last thing we needed was a Redcar side at the top of their game.

"Again, I struggle to fault the effort of our lads, but we were lacking at times when it came to speed, perhaps not surprising after writing off five bikes at Ashfield.

"We now have to concentrate on getting everyone fit and aboard top class machinery for the home and away clashes with Edinburgh next weekend."

He added: "Despite this setback, there is still plenty left in our season. The Jubilee League and the Championship play-offs as well as Pairs and individual glory. How we bounce back from the setbacks will decide how our season ends."

Bandits: Chris Harris 6, Theo Pijper 5, Leon Flint R/R, Ricky Wells 10+2, Aaron Summers 5, Jonas Knudsen 7+1, Nathan Stoneman 1

Bears: Charles Wright 11, Jason Edward 5+2, Erik Riss 12, Kasper Andersen 11+2, Lewis Kerr 8+1, Kyle Bickley 4, Jordan Jenkins 5.