

SGB Championship: Birmingham Brummies 48, Berwick Bandits 42

Leon Flint and Chris Harris combined for a last heat 5-1 as the FTS Bandits, powered by Keenwood Karpets, salvaged a point from a dusty Perry Barr.

But, despite another virtuoso performance from the Bandits' skipper, it was the guest-packed bottom of the table Brummies who took the spoils, opening up a 12-point lead after four heats, *writes George Dodds*.

Edinburgh Monarchs rider Kye Thomson headed Harris home in the first heat, the Bandits' skipper leaving himself too much to do, despite passing another guest in Paco Castagna who also rides for Edinburgh.

It was to be the only time he followed a Brummie home all night, the dusty bowl becoming the latest circuit to witness a 2022 Harris masterclass.

Harris became Berwick's first race winner in heat five, roaring home in what turned out to be the fastest time of the night but the Brummies led by 14 points before Flint and Jye Etheridge pushed Justin Sedgmen all the way.

Theo Pijper and guest Connor Coles shared heat eight with Starke an easy winner before Bandits' boss Gary Flint threw his captain into heat nine as a tactical substitute, a move which seemed to have backfired as Starke and Castagna left Harris well adrift with Wells a spectator.

The Italian was reeled in down the back straight and Harris then went in search of Starke, passing him in superb style on the third lap to bring the crowd to its feet.

Etheridge and Flint (picture courtesy of Berwick Bandits and *taken by Nia Martin*) then gated together only for Thomson to foil the 5-1 bid but Berwick had begun to chip away and reduced the lead by a further two points when Pijper emerged

from the dust to pass Lee Complin with Harris untroubled in the distance.

Wells again failed to back his skipper, an easy winner in 13, leaving Berwick scrambling to get anything out of another disappointing night.

Earlier in the day it had been announced that Flint had been promoted from track reserve to wildcard for Sunday's SGP2 at Cardiff and he ended the night strongly on the track where he first made his name as a 15-year-old.

He won the penultimate race and then rode a trademark brave outside line swoop to round Thomson, roaring away with Harris and passing his team-mate to clinch the losing point for the side.

With just home and away fixtures against Scunthorpe to come, Berwick's outside chance of sneaking into the final play-off place is all but over, although they could still finish above the Scorpions.

Once again the bureaucracy which has held up the processing of Jonas Knudsen's visa cost Berwick dearly as his points at the bottom of the order were badly missed in a tight finish. Instead, the Dane he was part of the SES side soundly beaten by Slangerup in the Metal League.

Gary Flint, promoter and team manager, said: "If his visa had been cleared then Jonas would have been on a plane to Birmingham and lining up for the Bandits.

"Once it became clear that UKVI were still not coming good on their promise to process it within seven weeks of our application then, instead of using rider-replacement for Anders Thomsen, SES got special dispensation from the Danish Motor Union to include Jonas in their team. After all, he needs to ride to earn money.

“The delay is incredibly frustrating, especially as we as a club did everything right with the application. It’s ten days until we ride again. Fingers remained crossed and every effort is being made to push the government department into action.

“On track it really was of our season in a nutshell, making too slow a start and giving ourselves too much to do. Jye eventually got going and we knew it was a tough ask for the two reserves – but they did keep battling. Leon ended strongly while Bomber (Chris Harris) was just superb once again.”

Brummies: Kye Thomson 10+1, Stefan Nielsen R/R, Paul Starke 12+1, Paco Castagna 8+2, Justin Sedgmen 10, Lee Complin 4+2, James Pearson 4.

Bandits: Chris Harris 16+1, Theo Pijper 3, Jye Etheridge 6+1, Leon Flint 10, Ricky Wells 4, Joe Thompson 2+1, Connor Coles 1+1.