

Berwick Bandits skid to disappointing defeat in final road fixture

SGB Championship: Scunthorpe Scorpions 60, Berwick Bandits 30

Berwick's final away fixture of a disappointing SGB Championship campaign saw them heavily beaten by a Scunthorpe Scorpions side which still has an outside chance of pipping Redcar Bears for the final play-off spot, *writes George Dodds*.

The FTS Bandits, powered by Keenwood Karpets, never recovered from the shock of seeing skipper Chris Harris on the wrong end of a heat one 5-1.

Ryan Douglas was one half of the successful home pairing and he repeated the rare feat in the last race of the night, securing his second successive home paid maximum in the process.

Despite the two setbacks, Harris still scored the bulk of his side's points but the only real support came from Jye Etheridge (pictured) as Berwick's young guns suffered a rare off-night.

Leon Flint had three pointless rides before winning heat 14 while comeback man Jonas Knudsen, whose long-running visa saga had only been solved the previous day, saw his night go the other way, winning heat two impressively and then suffering mechanical problems in later rides.

Scunthorpe have lost only one championship fixture at home this season and, not for the first time, Bandits made a shocking start to the night as they were handed a gating lesson by the home side.

The setting sun brought a temporary halt to proceedings but as

night-time fell the Scorpions continued to sting.

Harris became the first Bandit to reach the first bend in front and he was briefly joined by Theo Pijper before Jake Allen forced his way past the Dutchman only to fall heavily at the start of the third lap. The resulting awarded heat five would turn out to be the visitor's only heat advantage.

Etheridge briefly headed Tero Aarnio but again finishing second before Berwick's season-long cursed tactical substitution reared its head again as Harris, replacing Ricky Wells, gated sublimely in heat nine but Knudsen's bike failed to leave the start line.

A superb heat 10 saw Flint lead from the tapes only to be rounded by Simon Lambert and Douglas before Etheridge found the line to power around the Scorpions, but he couldn't shake-off Douglas who had the power to pip his countryman in the run to the flag.

Heat eleven saw two battles for the price of one as Aarnio and Harris repassed at the front with Roynon and Pijper equally competitive for third, the points eventually shared.

Etheridge was back to something like his early season form but still couldn't find a way past Wright in heat 12, again the race not decided until the finishing line.

Douglas inflicted a second defeat of the night on the fast-starting Harris, who also had to work to keep Aarnio at bay in 13 – Wells retiring while a distant fourth – before Flint broke the shackles by keeping the rapid, but somewhat erratic, Allen behind him in the penultimate race of the night.

For once this season it wasn't the British under-19 Champion joining his skipper in the nominated riders' race, Etheridge lining up alongside Harris in 15.

But the joy was short-lived as he picked up alarmingly going

into the first bend, his riderless bike miraculously missing the fast-starting Harris and Douglas but bringing down Aarnio.

Fortunately, the popular Aussie walked away from another hair-raising crash but, in the rerun, Aarnio made the gate and a rare mistake from Harris allowed Douglas to roar past and complete his second successive home paid maximum.

Stand-in team manager, Jamie Courtney, said: "That was a tough night against a Scunthorpe side which was fully focussed on the job in hand.

"It's a unique track and a number of our riders struggled to find the right set-up. Even though Bomber (Chris Harris) and Jye (Ethridge) were mixing it up front – and to a lesser degree Leon and Jonas – we never really recovered from our poor start. Having two bikes give out on the start line doesn't help but, to be honest, we were well beaten.

"The best part was to see Jye and Tero walk away unscathed from what was a very heavy heat 15 crash."

The victory means that when Scunthorpe complete their championship fixtures in the reverse fixture at Shielfield Park next Saturday they could still be in with a chance of pipping Redcar Bears for the final play-off place.

Scorpions: Ryan Douglas 13+2, Simon Lambert 8+2, James Wright 10, Jake Allen 5+2, Tero Aarnio 13, Adam Roynon 3+2, Anders Rowe 8+1.

Bandits: Chris Harris 12, Theo Pijper 3+1, Jye Etheridge 7, Leon Flint 3, Ricky Wells 1, Jonas Knudsen 4, Luke Crang 0.