

Crang match-winner as Berwick keep their cool at Plymouth

National Development League: Plymouth Centurions 44, Grant Henderson Tankers Bullets 45

Bullets kept their cool on a red-hot Devon evening to secure their second away success of the National Development League season in tricky conditions against a home side boosted by the inclusion of new signing Adam Roynon, *writes George Dodds*.

Ace Pijper and skipper Kyle Bickley gave them a dream start as they left the home pairing in their dusty wake in heat one, but the advantage was immediately wiped out by an eventful reserves' race.

Kieran Douglas had produced a trademark lightening trap to lead only for team-mate Ben Rathbone to slide off at the back. In the re-run Douglas lost the charge to the first turn and was then relegated to third place by Rhys Naylor.

Gating was proving to be vital, Luke Crang (pictured inside team-mate Mason Watson *by Keith Hamblin*) and Mason Watson comfortably restoring Berwick's four-point lead in three and Roynon half a lap ahead of Rathbone in four.

Bickley was warned for moving at the start after heat five was pulled back for an unsatisfactory start. Pijper won the re-run impressively and his team-mate managed to split the home pairing after an understandably careful start.

The Bullets maintained their six-point advantage until heat ten when Roynon and rider-replacement Morley combined for a maximum heat win.

Pijper's fall behind Bickley – inflicting the only defeat of the night on Roynon – cost the Bullets a point, but they

enjoyed a stroke of luck in the next heat when Richard Andrews' fall ruined a home 5-1.

An already hot evening threatened to boil over during a tumultuous heat 13 which began when referee Griffin deemed the start unsatisfactory and then ruled that Bickley had jumped for the second time on the night, the white exclusion light coming on.

What looked a poor decision to the naked eye became even worse when replays were shown on the livestream broadcast. Another one came in the rerun – which the Bullets' skipper started 15 metres behind the other three riders – as Roynon tried to go around Blair and both riders ended up in the third bend fence.

Neutral observers, along with some Bullets' officials, anticipated Blair's exclusion light coming on. What they didn't expect was it to be accompanied by Roynon's.

At the third attempt, Bickley was unable to make up the starting handicap on Morley and the teams went into the penultimate heat with a point between them.

Crang and Naylor clashed going into the first bend of heat 14, the referee calling all four back, but when the Plymouth rider hit the deck again in the rerun the race continued with Crang again out front.

Behind him Rathbone had to fend off some strong challenges from Abraham to take the second place which sealed victory.

While heat 15 was a bit of a let-down, Bickley and Crang unable to make any impression on Morley and Roynon and grab a fourth point, the celebrations had started in the visiting pits.

Berwick co-owner Jamie Courtney, team manager for the night, said: "I'm super proud of the way the boys stuck to their task. It was all about gating and that isn't always our strong

point. Even when we did make the gate the races tended to be called back by the referee.

“We’ve said more than once that winning isn’t everything at this level, it is equally important for riders not used to this type and size of track to get experience of its very different challenges.

“When your top scorer has nine points and the lowest is four and you’ve won away from home then you really can say that everyone has played their part in that win.”

The Bullets wrap up their league fixtures with trips to Mildenhall and Leicester, the results of which will decide who they face in the play-offs.

There is also the National League pairs at Leicester on August 20 with competition fierce for the Berwick nomination.

Centurions: Ben Morley 12+2, Ben Trigger R/R, Richard Andrews 4, Adam Extance 3+1, Adam Roynon 14, David Abraham 5+1, Rhys Naylor 6+1.

Bullets: Kyle Bickley 9+1, Ace Pijper 8, Mason Watson 4+3, Luke Crang 9, Greg Blair 6, Kieran Douglas 4, Ben Rathbone 5+2