

Berwick Bullets shot down by Mildenhall

National Development League, play-off, semi-final: Mildenhall Fen Tigers 67, Grant Henderson Tankers Berwick Bullets 22 (agg: 110-68)

Berwick's hopes of reaching the National Development League play-off final were cruelly ended on an afternoon of falls, mechanical mishaps and tape exclusions in Suffolk, *writes George Dodds.*

Skipper Kyle Bickley was responsible for half the Bullets' tally and was their only heat winner of the afternoon, taking the chequered flag in two of four races awarded by referee Barbara Horley on an incident-packed Suffolk event.

In contrast the Tigers – who meet Leicester in the final – saw all their riders paid for double figures with number one Jason Edwards and seven Luke Muff unbeaten by a Berwick rider.

Long-term Berwick Academy rider Luke Harrison followed up his fine performance in the first-leg with his maiden full maximum, a performance which is likely to lengthen the queue of teams hoping to land the 15-year old's signature this winter.

Reserve Mason Watson suffered three heavy falls and Luke Crang, the hero of the first leg at Shielfield Park last weekend, two tape exclusions on a tough afternoon for the visitors.

Mildenhall had overturned the three-point first leg deficit by

the end of heat two and chalked up 11 maximum heat wins.

Berwick's first respite came in a thrice-started heat five which saw Josh Warren excluded at the first time of asking, the remaining three riders called back after Alex Spooner was the meat in a Bullets sandwich and then, with the visitors looking good for a 4-2 Watson again hit the fence, Bickley being awarded the win in a two-horse race.

Heat 13 was another decided on the red lights, Crang breaking the tapes at the first time of asking and, having started off a 15-metre handicap, falling on the second bend of the third lap. Bickley had looked set to inflict the first defeat of the afternoon on Edwards after popping out of the start in the rerun, but the Essex racer hit back to relegate his opposite number to second on lap two.

Harrison completed his maximum in heat 14, more mechanical mishaps denying Kieran Douglas a point in the process.

Crang destroyed a second set of tapes in the final heat, but this time chose not to take the handicap.

Bickley was untroubled from tapes to flag in the rerun but Spooner's fall on the troublesome second bend gifted Douglas a point and the Bullets a second heat advantage with the race again awarded.

Berwick team manager Gary Flint said: "It's a shame the season ended in such a way, but it shouldn't detract from the fact that the seven riders who have worn the Bullets colours this season have all contributed to steering the club to its first play-off appearance.

"At some point every one of them has made a match-winning contribution to the cause and provided us with plenty of entertainment along the way.

"In just two years they have laid the foundations that the

club is looking to lay from the Duns training track, through the Academy and Bullets to the Bandits and beyond.

“It was not to be in terms of silverware but we now start looking at continuing the progress already made into the 2023 season. Other than that we simply have to congratulate Mildenhall on a job well done and wish them well in the final.”

Tigers: Jason Edwards 14+1, James Shanes r/r, Josh Warren 11+1, Alex Spooner 12+2, Danny Phillips 10+3, Luke Harrison 12, Luke Muff 8+4

Bullets: Kyle Bickley 11, Ace Pijper 3, Ben Rathbone 2, Luke Crang 3, Kieran Douglas 3, Mason Watson 0

PICTURE: Kyle Bickley leads, picture by ***Nia Martin***