

Bullets shot down on challenging track at Leicester

Berwick and Mildenhall will meet in the National Development League (NDL) play-off semi-finals after Leicester Lion Cubs beat rusty-looking Grant Henderson Tankers Berwick Bullets 52-37 in the Midlands.

Riders on both teams struggled to overcome challenging track conditions but Leicester clinching top spot in the NDL with this result.

They will face Oxford in the semi-finals while second place Mildenhall travel north on Saturday with the second leg in Suffolk provisionally pencilled in for October 16.

Kyle Bickley, Bullets No 1, led the challenge, dropping one point on the night to Connor Coles but his first race win was chaotic.

Home star Dan Thompson demolished the air fence in the first running of heat one and team-mate Max Perry hit the deck at the second time of asking, getting back to his feet.

He got up and walked back to the pits leaving Kyle Bickley and Ace Pijper – who had initially slowed anticipating the red lights coming back on – to cruise around unopposed.

Mason Watson (pictured courtesy of Berwick Bandits by **Taz McDougall**) split the home pair in heat two but none of the riders looked comfortable and were struggling to turn the bikes which led to extensive track work, Connor Coles and Tom Spencer putting the Lions ahead as riders still looked uncertain of conditions.

Greg Blair had to go off 15 metres after getting tangled up in

the tapes, Joe Thompson winning the restart but the impressive Watson prevented another home 5-1 as he caught Mickie Simpson on the line.

Bickley was fast out of the traps again for a more conventional heat win second time out, the only point dropped by Coles all night, while Blair was caught out by conditions on the second bend allowing Dan Thompson to overhaul him.

Luke Crang put a poor opening ride behind him to win a tight battle with Joe Thompson but the meeting effectively slipped away from the Bullets as they suffered back-to-back 1-5s.

Blair clipped Coles' back wheel in heat nine, both riders ending up in an untidy tangle of men and machines and Spencer got the better of the Berwick man after a good battle in the rerun, Coles taking a comfortable win before Perry fought off a determined effort from Crang to follow Dan Thompson home in heat ten.

Bickley stopped the rot with a third consecutive race win despite the attentions of Thompson but Coles and Simpson proved too strong for the Berwick pairing in heat 12.

Blair was in the wars again in 13, reacting well to lay down his bike and limit the damage after a puncture sent Thompson sprawling, brother Dan inflicting the first defeat of the night on Bickley in the rerun although the Bullets' No 1 seemed unlucky to be called back by the referee after a good start.

Crang split the home pairing in the penultimate heat and he took advantage in 15 when Spencer fell as he packed in behind Coles, allowing the Berwick pairing a fortuitous share of the points.

After waiting almost four weeks to complete their fixtures the Bullets must now focus of the tough task of Mildenhall as they bid to end the season in style.

Gary Flint, team manager, said: "You could tell that most of our boys haven't had a competitive outing for almost a month, but they battled well in difficult conditions.

"Having said that, reaching the play-offs was the aim and now we have to switch on and make sure that we battle for every point on Saturday night.

"Mason didn't make a start all night but looked really good while Kyle did what you want your No 1 to do.

"To be fair, everyone put in a decent shift and got on with it despite the conditions, and we go into the semi-final is a really positive frame of mind. Hopefully there will be a big crowd roaring the lads on in what has the makings of a classic."

Tickets for the semi-final – £10 – are on sale via the club website berwickspeedway.com/tickets

Cubs: Dan Thompson 9, Max Perry 3+1, Connor Coles 14, Tom Spencer 8+3, Joe Thompson 7, Vinnie Foord 4+2, Mickie Simpson 7+1

Bullets: Kyle Bickley 11, Ace Pijper 5+1, Ben Rathbone 0, Luke Crang 9, Greg Blair 5+2, Kieran Douglas 1, Mason Watson 6+1