

Slender lead for Fife in Challenge Cup semi-final

Viaplay Challenge Cup: first-leg: Fife Flyers 3, Sheffield Steelers 2; second-leg: Belfast Giants 2, Guildford Flames 3 (agg: 6-3)

Fife Flyers carry a slender one-goal lead over high-flying Sheffield Steelers into the second-leg of the Viaplay Challenge Cup, semi-final, at The House of Steel on Wednesday, February 15.

That's after 29-year-old Canadian defenceman Brayden Sherbinin followed-up his rebounded shot just over three minutes into the final session to secure a 3-2 win in the first-leg at Kirkcaldy.

Fife, who earned a semi-final berth for the first time in the club's history, by beating arch rivals, Dundee Stars in their quarter-final, took a 2-0 lead in the opening session against a side which snapped a two-game losing streak on their home ice at the weekend.

Michael Johansson was set up by Zack Phillips for the opener after 14 minutes and the goal came on the power play with Evan Mosey called for slashing.

And Steelers were punished for indiscipline again in the final minute of the period when Phillips, the club's top points gatherer this term, slotted with Brayden Sherbinin involved in the build-up. Time: 19min 31sec.

It took Steelers until the 28th minute before they opened their account, Robert Dowd netting with Niklas Nevalainen assisting and the visitors levelled at 2-2 when Jonas Emmerdahl was called for boarding and Martin Latal scored on the power play after 31 minutes.

Steelers exited the competition at the semi-final stage last season, going out to Cardiff Devils in a one-game match-up, but Fife, supported by Wolseley, and seeking to become the first Scottish club to earn a place in the Challenge Cup Final, hit back 12 minutes after that to go ahead 3-2 through British Columbia-born Sherbinin, one of Fife's assistant captains. Janne Kivilahti and Seth Bafaro were involved in the build-up.

Fife were outshot 39-25 overall and had to withstand late pressure from Steelers with Bafaro being twice called for hooking as the clock ticked down, but they held out.

In the other semi-final, Belfast Giants lost 3-2 at home to Guildford Flames but booked their place in the final with a 6-3 aggregate after winning the first-leg 4-0 in Surrey. The holders will host the final at the SSE Arena in Northern Ireland.

LIBRARY PICTURE: Fife v Sheffield