

# Late surge blasts Fife into Challenge Cup Final

**Viaplay Challenge Cup, semi-final, second-leg: Sheffield Steelers 4, Fife Flyers 3 (agg: 6-6). Flyers win after a shootout.**

Fife Flyers fans were celebrating after their favourites came from behind to book a slot in the Viaplay Challenge Cup Final against Belfast Giants in Northern Ireland on March 1.

But the club's dreams of becoming the first Scottish club to reach a major national final looked dead and buried when they lost the first session in the second-leg 3-0 against Sheffield Steelers in The House of Steel.

A last-period surge, in which Fife, sponsored by Wolseley, scored three goals in seven sensational minutes, turned the game on its head and then ice cool Mikael Johansson scored in the shootout.

Earlier, the Kirkcaldy club, who were 3-2 ahead after the first-leg at The Fife Ice Arena, were blown away 3-0 after the first session before a 9,057-crowd at the Utilita Arena, disappointing as coach Todd Dutiaume (pictured) had called on his men to play a smart, defensive game.

Steelers, who have dominated Fife this term, their first-leg defeat being their only loss to Flyers in five meetings this term, looked set to face Belfast, who are sponsored by Stena Line, but never-say-die Fife had other ideas.

Brett Neumann took only 1min 12sec to open Steelers account

and it was 2-0 when high-scoring defenceman Calle Ackered, signed from a Slovakian club on Monday, hours before the transfer deadline, slotted after 13 minutes on the power play.

Just over a minute later ex-Glasgow Clan centre Brendan Connolly made it 3-0 on another power play opportunity as Fife's discipline was called into question and it looked as if the Scots were down and out.

The sides blanked the middle session but Flyers' skipper Jonas Emmerdahl give the visitors hope with an unassisted opening goal after 47 minutes.

And Johansson, who has missed the last two weekends but played after a late fitness test, slotted their second to level the tie after 48 minutes with Dillon Lawrence supplying the final pass.

And Lucas Sandstrom netted unassisted with less than six minutes left on a power play chance to edge the visitors ahead after 37-year-old, Canadian-born, Connolly, who played for Great Britain in the 2021 World Championships, was called for hooking.

Fife were under extreme pressure as the clock ticked down and Lawrence was called for delaying the game with less than three minutes remaining giving the home side a one-man advantage on the power play.

And Fife finally cracked with only 18 seconds left when Danny Kristo broke Fife hearts when he was set up by Marc-Olivier Vallerand and Robert Dowd to put Sheffield ahead 4-3 and tie the game on aggregate taking the thriller into sudden death overtime.

Overall, Fife were outshot 37-20 in regulation time and the momentum was with the home side going into the extra session, but Fife survived the extra session before the game went to a

shootout.