

Bullets and Academy meet in double-header

TV pundits Greg Blair and Adam Roynon (pictured) can expect their own performances to be dissected when Berwick and Monarchs Academy clash in a National Development League (NDL) double, *writes George Dodds*.

Instead of adding colour to the action on livestream channel BSN, they captain their respective sides as Berwick Bullets and Edinburgh Monarchs' Academy look for points to haul themselves away from the foot of the table.

The sides also meet at Armadale on Friday but Roynon is missing, riding for his Championship side Poole in the first leg of the BSN Series Final at Glasgow. Belle Vue's Jack Smith guests before the Cumbrian returns when the action crosses the border to Shielfield Park.

It is repeat of the fixture which launched the Bullets in 2021 when, in the last days of COVID-19 lockdown a worldwide audience tuned in via livestreaming to watch the first competitive team event on a British speedway track for almost 18 months.

Current Bandits' skipper Leon Flint wrote his name into history as he led Nathan Greaves, Ryan McDonald and Sheldon Davies home in heat one, the Bullets winning on 50-40 but six days later – still behind closed doors – Armadale got their revenge with a six-point victory.

Last season the Bullets did the double – current Workington and Glasgow star Ace Pijper making a memorable professional debut as a 15-year-old at Armadale and winning the return comfortably thanks in no small measure to Kyle Bickley's maximum for the visitors.

Danny Phillips is an ever-present in the four previous fixtures – as a Devil – but he will sport the Bullets' number one at Armadale before Connor Coles reverts to the top of the team sheet the following night courtesy of the new greensheet averages.

Josh Embleton was also in the 2022 Armadale side but continues to be sidelined by injury, Berwick operating rider-replacement to cover for him while another to have appeared in all previous encounters, Kieran Douglas, returns to the Bullets' line-up.

He replaces Ben Rathbone, himself a 28-day stand-in for Archie Freeman, and renews what was a prolific reserve partnership with Mason Watson.

Watson has bounced back from a torrid start to the season and over the past two home meetings in particular has been giving Blair a run for his money in the previously rarely contested "most entertaining rider" category using racing lines that few – often with good reason – others dare.

Max Clegg replaced the retired Bickley in the Edinburgh line-up along with the latest from the conveyor belt of Cumbrian Moto-X talent making the switch to speedway, Mark Parker.

Monarchs also use rider-replacement to cover injured winter signing Alex Spooner. Mickie Simpson, initially dropped to accommodate Clegg's near 12-point average, is back at reserve with Parker named as number eight. Bullets name a rather more experienced number eight in the shape of ex-Kent man Jason Garrad who impressed Berwick management while guesting against the Kings at Iwade last month.

Jacob Hook was a dual Monarch but is now a Championship Bandit after being released by the Championship side but retained by the Academy while Kieran Lyden, promoted to number two, is a familiar face to supporters of Northern Junior League racing.

A first-time visitor to Shielfield will be Dayle Wood the 28-year-old Aussie who decided to follow his dream of racing in Europe, emailing clubs around Britain last October in his quest for a team berth.

Qualifying for dual nationality meant Edinburgh could bring him in on an assessed three-point average but Wood then hit the headlines after three-times World Champion Tai Woffinden sold-off the trophy he had just won at Mildura sparking a post-meeting auction which raised \$3,000. Wood used some of that unexpected windfall to buy equipment from former Shielfield and Armadale favourite Aaron Summers who was heading in the opposite direction, returning to Australia with his young family.

A promotion into the Championship side in the reshuffle which saw Hook replaced capped a surreal season for the man from Wagga Wagga.

Home victories over Belle Vue and Kent got Edinburgh's campaign off to a flying start but since then they have struggled, the latest of five successive defeats coming at Leicester on Saturday night, Hook scoring 12 of their 37 points in the East Midlands.

Connor Coles scored seven guesting for the Cubs having had a Championship outing as Jake Mulford's stand-in for Redcar against Plymouth the previous night.

Friday's action gets underway at 7.30pm with the Shielfield Park meeting starting at 7pm.

Academy: Friday: Max Clegg, Kyran Lyden, Jack Smith, Alex Spooner R/R, Jacob Hook, Mickie Simpson, Dayle Wood, Mark Parker. Saturday: Clegg, Lyden, Spooner R/R, Adam Roynon, Hook, Simpson, Wood, Parker.

Bullets: Friday: Danny Phillips, Josh Embleton R/R, Jamie Halder, Connor Coles, Greg Blair, Kieran Douglas, Mason

Watson, Jason Garrad. Saturday: Coles, Embleton R/R, Phillips,
Halder, Blair, Douglas, Watson, Garrad