

# Tiny margins count as Bandits edged by Cheetahs

## Cab Direct Championship: Berwick Bandits 44, Oxford Cheetahs 46

One of the cheapest components on a speedway bike cost Berwick Bandits dear on a night when tiny margins proved decisive.

Dane Thomas Jorgensen was left floundering at the start of heat seven but found the drive and straight-line to pass first Cameron Heeps and then Jordan Jenkins only for his engine to lose power entering the last lap, the fault traced back to a failed spark plug.

A shared heat became a Cheetahs' 5-1, a six-point lead for the home side slashed to just two in the process, but Bandits maintained the margin for much of the night only to concede decisive back-to-back 5-1s in heats 13 and 14.

Despite guest Erik Riss and skipper Leon Flint combining in heat 15 to end the maximum hopes of both Scott Nicholls and Sam Masters, the points had already been lost.

The incident-packed match began disastrously for the visitors, Lewis Kerr picking up too much drive on the first turn and being thrown off his machine as it clattered into the barrier, narrowly missing Masters. Kerr withdrew from the meeting with a knee injury.

Connor Coles and Jacob Hook combined to win the reserves' race easily before Jye Etheridge bravely rode the fence to round Heeps while the slow-starting Jonas Knudsen battled into third for a 4-2.

Heat winners were scarce for Berwick – a problem not suffered by the table-topping visitors – with Masters or Nicholls who were winning races at a canter.

Indeed, Bandits would manage only four race winners all night but battling for the minor places kept them narrowly ahead.

Flint and Riss left Heeps and Jenkins floundering to open up what looked capable of being a decisive four-point lead, but Oxford pulled points back in 11 as Jorgensen continued to lack power and then reserve Henry Atkins put the cat among the pigeons by keeping Etheridge and Coles at bay in heat 12 after partner Heeps had fallen on the first bend.

Heat 13 was always likely to be pivotal with Masters and Nicholls both lining up unbeaten only for Riss to make an electric start. As home fans began to celebrate, the red lights came on, referee Dave Watters warning Masters to stay still.

The Oxford pairing took advantage of their reprieve to shut the German out of the re-run and suddenly Oxford led for the first time, sealing victory in the next heat as Atkins and Jenkins combined to leave an out of sorts Knudsen to race his own team-mate Hook to the line.

Flint and Riss at least ended the night on a positive note with their heat 15 heroics, but the match had gone.

Four points from the Danish engine room was not in the gameplan, neither was providing so few only four race wins but despite that, thanks largely to a rejuvenated Etheridge and a solid performance from the reserve pairing, Berwick could still have stopped Oxford in their tracks had fortune favoured them on at least two occasions.

Kevin Little, Bandits' team manager, said: "It is hard to point the finger at anyone as even those who were struggling for points put a lot of effort in. Nobody has pushed Oxford

this close in the Championship so there is plenty to be positive about despite the result.

“Again the reserves did their job and more while Jye looked very much the old Jye with some powerful and fearless racing while Leon played a real captain’s role.

“The decision to rerun heat 13 even though Sam Masters had handicapped himself by moving proved costly while TJ’s breakdown was one of those things you couldn’t have predicted. In a meeting of such small margins incidents like that are decisive.”

**Bandits:** Erik Riss 9+2, Leon Flint 10+2, Jye Etheridge 9, Jonas Knudsen 3+2, Thomas Jorgensen 1+1, Jacob Hook 6+1, Connor Coles 6+1

**Cheetahs:** Sam Masters 11+1, Lewis Kerr 0, Cameron Heeps 6+1, Jordan Jenkins 7+1, Scott Nicholls 13, Henry Atkins 9, Ryan Kinsley 0

PICTURE: Keeping it tight, Berwick’s Jye Etheridge and Connor Coles try to pass Henry Atkins and Cameron Heeps. Picture **Nia Martin**