

Flint celebrates after Bandits shade Bears

What a difference a week makes. Seven days earlier, Leon Flint held his head in his hands after a puncture and subsequent mechanical failure handed Edinburgh Stellar Monarchs victory at Berwick Bandits.

Fast forward to Saturday and Flint (pictured) held his nerve and steered injury-ravaged Berwick to only their second Cab Direct Championship victory of the season thanks to a narrow 46-44 win over Redcar Bears at Shielfield Park.

He successfully repelled a spirited challenge from Charles Wright to secure the second place in the final heat which handed the Borders side the points.

Bandits' skipper stood tall on the pegs, punching the air, and milking the acclaim of the crowd, after breaking the Redcar Bears Shielfield Park hoodoo at the sixth attempt.

Having roared into an early 12-point lead, Bandits had to dig deep as Wright and Danny King recorded 5-1s in heats 11 and 13 to send the highly-entertaining match into a last heat decider.

The home side's depth of scoring triumphed over the top-heavy visitors, five home riders winning races and packing in for the vital minor places.

As tensions rose Connor Bailey and Jye Etheridge became embroiled along with officials and mechanics at the end of Heat 12.

Earlier, Bandits went into the match minus crooked Rory Schlein, Thomas Jorgensen, and Jacob Hook but they shopped well for guests, Richie Worrall getting them off to a flier as he shepherded Jonas Knudsen to a Heat one 5-1.

Connor Coles and Luke Killeen extended the lead even though Jason Edwards found a way past the Oxford teenager while former Edinburgh rider, Justin Sedgmen, whose Shielfield Park record going into this meeting was, to say the least, modest, left Wright trailing.

Delight turned to disbelief as Etheridge gated and Flint joined his partner after rounding King in exhilarating fashion to open up a 21-9 lead after five races.

Edwards and Wright then pulled two points back, but Sedgmen rode a perfect opening bend in seven to roar past Riss down the back straight and only an excellent pass by Danyon Hume prevented another home maximum in eight, passing Coles but unable to catch a back to form Knudsen.

Wright took the chequered flag at the third attempt and Bailey then caught Knudsen on the run to the line for third place in ten.

Heat 11 tactical substitute Wright and King pulling a further four points back after Sedgmen missed the gate for the first time on the night.

Edwards won Heat 12 at a canter but all the action was behind him as Etheridge fended off a sustained challenge from Bailey in another full throttle battle for points, things getting heated between the pair after the chequered flag.

Worrall and Sedgmen found themselves on the wrong end of a

King/Wright heat 13 maximum as suddenly the home lead was cut to just two points.

It needed something special in the penultimate heat and captain fantastic duly delivered, Flint riding a scorching opening lap to leave another former Edinburgh rider, Eric Riss trailing in second and under serious threat from the impressive Coles who easily beat Edwards for the vital third place.

Not surprisingly Redcar went with the King/Wright partnership as the searched for the 5-1 which would have sent the meeting into a Superheat, Worrall getting the nod over Etheridge and Sedgmen to partner Flint.

Flint brought the crowd to its feet with a sublime gate. King managed to find a way past on the second lap but, despite throwing the kitchen sink at it, Wright had to settle for third.

An ecstatic Flint dedicated the victory to his injured teammates, especially Jorgensen who is still in an Edinburgh hospital after breaking vertebrae in his neck and back in a crash on Friday night.

Flint said: "I'd like to think that the win might ease the pain for Rory, Jacob and, especially TJ who was very much in our thoughts tonight. The three guests really put in a shift for us and laid the foundations for the win early on."

He added: "Everybody contributed, Connor, Jye and Luke Killeen getting vital points when we needed them. We knew Redcar would come hard in the closing stages and it was a case of gritting our teeth and doing the hard yards.

"I knew that Charles was not too far behind me but there was no way I was going to give up that second place. All seven Bandits had worked far too hard not to bring it home."

And the skipper said: "After going close but coming up short too many times so far this needs to be the springboard to get our season up and running."

Bandits: Richie Worrall 9, Jonas Knudsen 5+1, Jye Etheridge 6+3, Leon Flint 12, Justin Sedgmen 7, Luke Killeen 1, Connor Coles 6

Bears: Danny King 10+1, Danyon Hume 2, Connor Bailey 3+2, Erik Riss 9, Charles Wright 12+1, Jason Edwards 8, Luke Harrison 0