

Lawson an inspired guest for Brummies

A fourth defeat in five Cab Direct Championship fixtures effectively ended Berwick's hopes of reaching the end of season play-offs and, at the same time, catapulting the buzzing Brummies into the mix. Brummies won 50-40, writes George Dodds.

It was a familiar story for the Bandits as they "lost" the closing four races 16-8, Birmingham guest Richard Lawson recording his second maximum at the Borders' circuit, skipper Justin Sedgmen dropping a solitary point and the visiting middle order all performing strongly.

In contrast, on a night when they were already missing Danes Hans Andersen and Jonas Knudsen, Berwick managed just six race winners.

Three came from Rory Schlein who took the battle to the Brummies but even his night ended badly as a heavy first bend fall saw him unable to take his part in the re-run of heat 15 – Lawson and the impressive Alfie Bowtell rubbing salt into the home side's wounds with a closing maximum heat advantage.

Although he limped away from the stadium, Schlein expects to take his place in Monday's British Final at Belle Vue.

Jye Etheridge continued his good run of home scores with

another double figure haul, but captain Leon Flint – so often the leading light and saviour of the Bandits this season – managed just five points.

His third bend fall while second in heat four gave Birmingham a lead they never surrendered, even though the home side did draw the scores level again and maintain that parity over the middle heats.

Guest Simon Lambert had already hit the third bend foam barrier with a thump in heat three, but referee Chris Durno awarded the race as it entered the third lap, albeit Etheridge deserved the win having squeezed past Troy Batchelor on the back straight.

Steve Boxall had another difficult night, but did manage to outsmart Batchelor, the Aussie diving inside him to take third place, Flint's race win over Bowtell levelling the scores after seven heats.

Coles had recovered from a poor start in heat eight to dive up the inside Paul Starke down the back straight only for the former Bandit to take his front wheel from under him going onto the third bend, referee Chris Durno incensing most of the crowd by excluding the home man.

Lambert had been well adrift when the race was stopped and gated poorly again in the rerun, but he was not to be denied, rounding Starke, and then squeezing past Stefan Nielsen down the home straight for a stunning race win which kept the scores level.

Schlein aggressively cut back inside Batchelor to ensure a share in ten, but the Brummies edged ahead again when a terrible gate from the Bandits pairing saw Lawson and Nielsen on a 5-1 before Boxall forced his way past the Danish-born Brummie.

Coles turned the tables on Starke in 12 going hard under him

into the third bend and taking out his opponent's front wheel, the Brummies reserve hitting the barrier hard but again the Berwick reserve was adjudged the guilty party and excluded.

Etheridge split the visiting pairing in the rerun but when Schlein was unable to get past Lawson in 13 with Sedgmen off in the distance the Brummies were over the line.

Schlein took the tactical substitute ride in 14 and found a way past the fast-gating Starke (pictured by **Taz McDougall**) on the last lap, Etheridge picking up the minor place.

Berwick fielded the same pairing in 15 but after Schlein's fall neither Etheridge nor reserve Coles could lay a glove on the visiting pairing, Bowtell rounding off a miserable night for the home support by following Lawson home.

Team manager Kevin Little said: "Unfortunately the track played wright into the hands of Birmingham tonight and they took full advantage. Richard Lawson was an inspired choice of guest while Justin Sedgmen obviously learned a lot when he helped us beat Redcar a couple of weeks ago.

"Until it's mathematically impossible we will not give up the fight to reach the play-offs, but it is really out of our hands now. We would have to win all our remaining fixtures and hope other teams slipped up."

Bandits: Rory Schlein 12, Simon Lambert 5+1, Jye Etheridge 11, Hans Andersen R/R, Leon Flint 4+1, Steve Boxall 5, Connor Coles 3+1

Brummies: Richard Lawson 14+1, Stefan Nielsen 4, Troy Batchelor 7, Alfie Bowtell 6+3, Justin Sedgmen 11, Sam Hagon 0, Paul Starke 8+1