

# **Bandits deny injury-hit Gladiators**

**Berwick Bandits avoided bottom spot in the Cab Direct Championship with an emphatic 52-38 victory over patched-up Plymouth Gladiators, writes George Dodds.**

Plymouth bosses had been forced to burn to midnight oil to even field a team, the withdrawal of Kyle Howarth after an accident at Edinburgh the previous night being the biggest body blow. In the end, they used four guests, rider-replacement and only two of their own riders.

The riders who accepted the booking came prepared to earn their money the hard way with the back straight fence under constant threat.

Simon Lambert skippered Scunthorpe to victory over the Bandits 24-hours earlier and he lined up for the coin toss wearing the metaphorical armband for Plymouth.

And he seemed to quickly mould a team very much in his own ultra-competitive image as he dominated the night's scorechart with 15 plus one bonus from his seven rides.

Along with Redcar's Jason Edwards, Edinburgh's Kye Thomsen and James Pearson, he gave the home riders a real headache.

After fairly routine race wins from Rory Schlein and Jacob Hook, the recently free-scoring Leon Flint/Jye Etheridge pairing opened up a six-point lead with a heat three 5-1.

This was immediately trimmed when guest Luke Killeen's engine seized at the start and Lambert roared around Hans Andersen, Pearson just having enough power to freewheel over the line for a 4-2.

Flint (pictured) and Etheridge repeated their early maximum in five but, despite another comfortable win from Schlein, Plymouth shared the points in six.

Hook showed plenty of speed at the back of that race but went too near the fence once too often and came very close to a high-speed wipeout on the second bend of lap three.

Plymouth upset the applecart as Lambert was given a tactical substitute ride in seven, Thomsen following him home for a comfortable 5-1 which trimmed the lead to four points.

Etheridge continued his unbeaten start to the night in eight, Edwards squeezing past the fast-starting Hook to limit the damage.

Three successive shared heats were not without incident. Lambert and Schlein both had to be aggressive round the boards in the early stages of their race and then Hook had a tremendous battle with first Edwards and then Pearson to work his way into second place behind Andersen only to slide off on the first bend of the last lap of 11.

The young Aussie picked himself up and after another couple of hairy back straight battles with countryman Pearson found himself leading with Etheridge, warned for rolling in the first running of the race, tucked in behind.

Schlein's hopes of a first 2023 maximum were dashed when Edwards finally found his way out of the gate in 13, the Bandits' man suffering engine problems as Plymouth recorded another heat advantage.

Flint completed his now customary heat 14 romp to the flag,

but all the action was behind him with Hook and Thomson defying the knowledge that they are big friends off-track during a wild four laps which ended with another 5-1 from the home side.

There was just time for Schlein and Lambert to round off a hugely-entertaining evening by passing and re-passing before Schlein brought the curtain down on the Championship campaign in thrilling style.

Kevin Little, Berwick's team manager, said: "First of all full credit to Plymouth whose guests really got stuck in and gave us plenty of headaches on the night, especially Simon Lambert.

"After a tough season it was good to see six of our riders get a race win and there was some really entertaining racing. I'm especially pleased for Jacob who had a tricky start to the night but bounced back and deservedly won the most entertaining rider award from our match sponsors."

He added: "It has been a difficult and disappointing season but, at least, we go out with a win."

**Bandits:** Rory Schlein 12, Jye Etheridge 11+3, Leon Flint 11+1, Hans Andersen 8, Jacob Hook 9+1, Luke Killeen 1

**Gladiators:** Jason Edwards 10, Matt Marson 1+1, Kye Thomson 6+1, Simon Lambert 15+1, James Pearson 6+2, Ben Trigger 0