

Monarchs stung and Bullets bow out

Edinburgh Stellar Monarchs disappointing season continued when they skidded to a 54-36 defeat in the Cab Direct championship play-off, Group A, at home to Scunthorpe Scorpions.

Only skipper Josh Pickering made double-figures with 12 in the clash in which the English side won the aggregate bonus point. Ryan Douglas was their top man with 13 points.

Kye Thomson was next best with nine points and guest Justin Sedgmen and Paco Castagna (pictured) both scored six points. Lasse Fredriksen and Dayle Wood failed to trouble the scorers and Bastan Borke claimed three.

Scorpions won the first heat 4-2 and also the second by the same scoreline. The home side drew the next 3-3 but a 5-1 in Heat Four, Michael Palm Toft and Drew Kemp producing the goods, showed early that the writing was on the wall.

Scunthorpe were 32-16 ahead after Heat Eight but lost the next race when Paco Castagne came home in front with Thomson in second position. Scorpions snapped back with a 5-1 in Heat Ten and were never really under pressure after that.

The visitors blasted back to form with this dominant victory only 24-hours after their Cab Direct Championship title hopes took a huge hit when they lost at home to Poole Pirates.

They did all they could at Armadale, repeating the scoreline from their recent league win at the same venue.

Edinburgh manager Alex Harkess said: "I hoped beforehand that we could raise our game for the play-offs, and that maybe Scunthorpe would be a little subdued after their home defeat. Wrong on both counts. There were some exciting moments, but

our performance overall was very disappointing.”

Elsewhere, Berwick Bullets were edged 46-44 as Freddy Hodder and James Pearson combined for a Heat 15 scoreline of 5-1 to deny Bullets victory in their last-ever National Development League outing, *writes George Dodds*.

The Colts’ secured a remarkable victory in a race awarded after home joint top score Danny Phillips crashed heavily trying to secure the second place which would have forced the match into a Superheat decider.

After nine heats the injury and suspension-ravaged bottom club – who will not come to the tapes in 2024 – led by 12 points only to run out of steam – and machinery – in the closing stages.

Berwick have featured in five last-heat deciders this season and lost the lot which – along with season-ending injuries to Josh Embleton and Connor Coles and the suspension of Steve Boxall – explains their final league position.

Danny Phillips had rattled off four straight race wins going into Heat 13 only to find himself out of contention after the visiting pairing of Pearson and Jack Smith blocked his run from the second bend.

Crucially former Bullet Luke Crang, who had himself only been beaten by Pearson in the opening heat, was pipped by the width of a wheel by Smith for a crucial 5-1 which pegged the deficit to just two points.

Pearson and the hugely impressive Hodder then outgated Phillips again in the decider with the home man taking an uncomfortable looking tumble on the third bend as he looked in vain for the second place which would have sent the evening into a Superheat. Instead referee Jim McGregor awarded the heat, and victory, to the Colts.

Berwick got off to a cracking start as Crang and debutant Senna Summers hit the front in heat one only for Pearson to roar past both and share the heat.

Sam Woods found conditions, the track made heavy by mid-afternoon rain – difficult to cope with, the Colts' reserve suffering the first in a series of spills in a second heat which went the way of captain for the night Mason Watson and Kieran Douglas.

Crang's second win was a straightforward affair but with partner Archie Freeman understandably tentative on his return from a season-long leg injury it was another shared heat.

Summers was looking very assured for an 18-year-old in only his second competitive speedway meeting, and he was comfortably clear of Jack Shimelt in his second outing, Crang lowering Smith's colours as Berwick extended their lead to six points, which became eight when Phillips accounting for Hodder while Woods was on the deck again as he challenged Douglas for third.

A chaotic heat eight saw Summers fighting to regain control after pulling an enormous wheelie from the start and back in contention as the riders reached the third bend. Watson was well clear but behind him Woods fell again, team-mate Edward Davidson laying the bike down while Summers ended up in the safety barrier taking avoiding action.

Referee Jim McGregor put on Davidson's exclusion light and then the red lights as the Redcar Cub tried to take his place at the startline.

The official overturned his decision after watching video footage of the incident, the lack of definition between the white and yellow helmet covers taking the blame for the confusion.

Mounted on Freeman's machinery, Summers took his third point of the night, Watson again winning comfortably. A brave second

bend by Phillips to round Smith and with Freeman opening his account Berwick led by 12 points.

Crang beat Smith to the first bend in ten only for the race to be red-lighted and the Colts' skipper warned for not staying still at the start. Inevitably Smith got the drop in the rerun, Hodder showing his liking for the Berwick track by rounding the Workington skipper coming off turn four.

A hard first bend by Phillips inflicted the first defeat of the night on Pearson in 11 but Hodder took the flag again in 12 with Shimelt just having enough to keep former Newcastle team-mate Freeman at bay.

After the disastrous heat 13, Watson and Douglas followed Hodder home to set up one final last heat decider before the Bullets were consigned to speedway's history books.

Promoter Steve Dews, team manager for the night, said: "I'm disappointed for the boys because they gave us everything they and it would have been good to see them rewarded for that.

"Senna Summers had a debut to remember while Archie did remarkably well after returning from such a serious injury. In the end we were just stretched too thin, man and machine, in the closing stages.

"I also have to congratulate all the riders who, on a testing track, simply got on with racing and served up a meeting which ended our brief National League history in fine style."

Bullets: Luke Crang 10, Senna Summer 3+1, Archie Freeman 2, Danny Phillips 12, Kieran Douglas 5+2, Mason Watson 12

Colts: James Pearson 13+1, Edward Davidson 5+2, Freddy Hodder 12+1, Jack Smith 13, Jack Shimelt 2, Sam Woods 0