

Dickson's red-hot phone fails to find substitute

Long-term injury again robs the Berwick Jewson Bandits of the services of Rory Schlein and Bastian Borke as play-off bound Oxford Cheetahs visit Shielfield Park on Saturday (7pm).

Edinburgh's Lasse Fredriksen steps in at reserve but the Borders' side has drawn a blank when it comes to replacing their influential skipper.

Two other Cab Direct Championship meetings on Saturday rule out Scunthorpe, Workington, Redcar and Plymouth riders while Glasgow's Steve Worrall and Edinburgh's Justin Sedgmen are injured and a number of other possibilities committed to racing in Poland this weekend.

An obvious stand-in would be Worrall's Tigers' team-mate Leon Flint: Berwick-born, Berwick-based and a club asset. Indeed he lives so close to Shielfield Park that he cycled there from his home to make a guest appearance in Edinburgh colours last week.

That appearance means he is ineligible for Saturday's clash because the sport's regulations decree that you cannot guest at a track more than once in an eight-day period unless replacing a club's number one.

As a result the Bandits have opted for rider-replacement with the pressure on in-form Drew Kemp (pictured), a 13-point

match-winner against the Monarchs, stand-in skipper Lewi Kerr, Danyon Hume and Jye Etheridge to cover Schlein's rides.

A frustrated team manager, Stewart Dickson, said: "If I had shares in telecoms I would be a rich man after this week. I have been working the phones and emailing every suitable option but drawn a blank.

"Workington and Redcar are also in the market for guests, albeit not in such influential positions as Rory, but our best option is to use rider-replacement and it is up to the boys to step up and cover for their skipper."

He added: "Oxford are a good side but we showed against Edinburgh that we can dig deep and find ways of winning."

Oxford are led by 46-year-old British speedway legend Scott Nicholls who is still banging in the points and Australian Sam Masters who has scored over 100 points on his last nine visits to Berwick, winning 29 races along the way and racking up back-to-back maximums for Edinburgh in 2021 and 2022.

But the Midlands side also have an inexperienced tail with three riders – Ashton Boughen, Luke Killeen and Jody Scott still in their teens and that inexperience has shown as they've lost all three Championship meetings away from Cowley, albeit only after a Super Heat at Redcar.

With matches in hand on all their rivals Oxford have a good chance of at least repeating last year's runner-up spot but still have some big meetings to come – home and away to Glasgow who knocked them out of last year's play-offs and trips to both Poole and Scunthorpe but their away form must be a concern.

They are also due to face Redcar in the KO Cup semi-final next month.

But first up it's a visit to Shielfield. Tickets are £18 until

midnight on Friday, £20 (£18 concessions and students) on the day or at the cash turnstiles. Accompanied under-16s admitted free.

Bandits: Lewi Kerr, Danyon Hume, Jye Etheridge, Drew Kemp, Guest or R/R, Freddy Hodder, Lasse Fredriksen

Oxford: Sam Masters, Cameron Heeps, Ashton Boughen, Jordan Jenkins, Scott Nicholls, Luke Killeen, Jody Scott