

Leeds Knights 1-5 (4-9) Hull Seahawks: Davies' side progress to the National Cup Final (2nd February 2024)

The second leg of the National Cup Semi-Final was hosted by Leeds Knights at The Castle on Friday night as they took on Hull Seahawks, fighting for a place in the final. The hosts were coming into the game one-goal down following the Seahawks' 4-3 victory at the Hull Ice Arena in the first leg of the semi-final on Wednesday, but now the Knights were in front of their home crowd and were hungry to put the game to bed.

After three periods of hockey in Leeds, it was the Seahawks who were victorious and have progressed to the final of the National Cup where they will face either MK Lightning or Swindon Wildcats.

Last time round

When Hull Seahawks were last welcomed to The Castle on December 22nd, they managed to take the two points with goals from #91 Nathan Salem, #21 Bobby Chamberlain and a brace from #11 Finlay Ulrick securing a 4-2 victory, but the second game of the Yorkshire derby double header the following night saw the Knights beat the Seahawks 5-0 at the Hull Ice Arena with #31 Sam Gospel recording a shutout.

First period (0-2)

Lining up with a squad of 18+2, the Knights were still without #24 Dylan Hehir and #91 Jake Witkowski, but they did see the return of #19 Innes Gallacher, #26 Tommy Spraggon and #32 Harrison Walker. The visitors also iced with a squad of 18+2, opting for #72 Jordan McLaughlin in between the pipes.

#31 Sam Gospel, #54 Noah McMullin, #8 Bow Neely, #37 Matt Barron, #11 Matt Haywood and #2 James Archer were the starting six for the Knights as the second leg of the National Cup Semi-Final got underway at The Castle.



Immediate early pressure from the visitors showed they weren't prepared to give up their one-goal advantage, but rather they were keen to extend it and they did exactly that at 1:17 when #24 Brock Bartholomew fired home the opening goal of the game, assisted by #74 Lee Bonner and #11 Finlay Ulrick. Continuing to control the game having started on the front foot, #24 Brock Bartholomew forced Gospel to make a glove save with #11 Finlay Ulrick testing the Knights netminder further with a shot he was able to comfortably push away with his stick before #8 Bow Neely was preventing #71 Emil Svec from finding the back of the net in the crease.

Trying to find a way back into the game, Leeds pushed forwards into the offensive zone with good pressure on the Hull defencemen leading to #11 Matt Haywood and #12 Kieran Brown having a chance to poke the puck beyond McLaughlin, but the Seahawks' netminder stood tall to deny them from reducing the deficit at 8:35.

It was a fairly uneventful first period following the opening goal with neither side creating grade-A chances and Leeds struggling to get a foothold in the game as the visitors furiously intercepted their passes - that was until 15:01 when #37 Matt Barron received two-minutes for holding sending the Seahawks on the powerplay. #74 Lee Bonner scored the powerplay goal at 16:46, tipping in a shot from #24 Brock Bartholomew with the second assist going to #96 Owen Sobchak.

Desperately trying to claw a goal back before the end of the period, #11 Matt Haywood forced McLaughlin to make a pad block before #54 Noah McMullin fired a shot in that Hull's goalie could catch with his glove as the final minute was played. The Seahawks took a three-goal lead on aggregate into the second period with the hosts needing to pull off a terrific comeback across the next 40-minutes of regulation hockey if they wanted to be in with a chance of booking their place in the final.

Second period (0-3)

It was a penalty against #24 Brock Bartholomew for holding that started the second period sending the Knights on their first powerplay of the evening, but it was the visitors who had the closest chance as Bartholomew sat in the Ward Hadaway penalty box with #11 Finlay Ulrick having a shorthanded chance that forced Gospel to make a glove save.

At 21:34, #41 Oli Endicott sat two-minutes for cross-checking as the game was to be played four-on-four. #96 Owen Sobchak played a perfect pass to #11 Finlay Ulrick who was able to tap home at the back door and extend the Seahawks' lead to three on the night, four on aggregate, at 21:57.

A two-minute minor for interference was awarded to #73 Josh Hodgkinson at 24:30 before #16 Sam Towner joined him with a two-minute penalty for slashing, sending the Knights on a three-on-five powerplay, but the hosts couldn't capitalise upon their player advantage with the score remaining 3-0 in the Seahawks' favour as they successfully killed the penalty.



#6 Ethan Hehir's shot flew over McLaughlin as Hull returned to full strength with #33 Finn Bradon and #19 Innes Gallacher bringing energy and hunger to the ice at 28:18 as they combined to create pressure around the Seahawks' net, their efforts to slip the puck past McLaughlin at the near post denied the goalie's pads and cleared by #21 Bobby Chamberlain.

The hosts were on the penalty kill at 28:30 as #3 Bailey Perre received two-minutes for interference, but #95 Mac Howlett seized the opportunity of a gap in the visitors' defence at 29:10 as he burst into the offensive zone - his shorthanded chance slipped past McLaughlin who was on the edge of the crease, but it narrowly missed crossing the line as the Hull netminder reacted to the danger quickly and shot out his stick to clear.

A face-off in the offensive zone provided #12 Kieran Brown with a chance to open the Knights' account but his shot went wide. #9 Jordan Buesa tried his luck at 32:40 but McLaughlin managed to get his hand to it, tipping it past the net before #19 Innes Gallacher worked the puck in well from the left, his shot blocked by the body of McLaughlin with the rebound falling into the crease and being quickly cleared by the Hull defencemen.

The Knights' short burst of pressure didn't last too long with Hull back on the attack at 36:38, testing Gospel who was forced to make a glove save. At 39:15, #74 Lee Bonner received a five-minute penalty and was ejected from the game after checking to the head sending the Knights on the powerplay. Despite losing possession often and gifting the Seahawks opportunities going forwards, the Knights managed to hold on until the end of second period having only conceded one goal in the middle frame.

Third period (1-5)

Leeds began the third period with 4:15 remaining on the powerplay and #37 Matt Barron made good use of this at 41:13 with his hard work rewarded as his shot rolled across the line, assisted by #12 Kieran Brown and #9 Jordan Buesa, reducing the deficit by one.



The visitors returned to five skaters at 44:15 and fired past Gospel again at 47:50 with #71 Emil Svec scoring the Seahawks' fourth of the night at the back post, assisted by #21 Bobby Chamberlain and #96 Owen Sobchak after another strong offensive play. Hull didn't lay off the pressure with another shot finding the back of the Knights' net at 48:21, unassisted and scored by the captain #16 Sam Towner who wanted in on the scoring action.

It was difficult for Leeds to put chances together as they continued to chase the game in the final ten minutes, even despite going on the powerplay at 50:34 when #22 Jordan Fisher sat two-minutes for holding. At 51:44, #12 Kieran Brown and #91 Nathan Salem both received two-minutes for roughing, their penalties cancelling each other out as the game remained five-on-four. #54 Noah McMullin fired over at 54:25 before #8 Bow Neely tried his luck at 55:05, his shot caught by McLaughlin. Coinciding penalties for #2 James Archer and #94 Declan Balmer for roughing ended off the game with the Seahawks beating the Knights by five goals to one, 9-4 on aggregate.

The Thermos Sponsored MVPs were awarded to #24 Brock Bartholomew for the visitors, and to #54 Noah McMullin for the hosts.

The Leeds Knights are back home on Saturday evening at The Castle where they will return to league action, looking to bounce back from their semi-final defeat with victory over Raiders IHC, searching for another two points to extend their lead at the top of the table.

Match report written by Emily Laycock

Photos taken by Jacob Lowe