

Leeds Knights 5-1 Sheffield Steeldogs: Ending 2023 on a high with victory in the Yorkshire derby (30th December 2023)

The Sheffield Steeldogs were welcomed to The Castle by the Morley Glass Leeds Knights on Saturday evening for the second time this season for the first game of the Yorkshire derby double-header.

Last time round, the Knights produced an impressive 5-0 victory with Sam Gospel grabbing his second shutout of the season. Goals from Oli Endicott, Mac Howlett, and a hat-trick from captain, Kieran Brown, secured the two points that sent them to the top of the NIHL table.

Sheffield Steeldogs were coming to The Castle this time on the back of a coaching change as Stevie Weeks came in to replace Jason Hewitt who stepped down due to “personal circumstances” and following a 5-4 victory over Telford Tigers. The Steeldogs had a terrific comeback at home on Thursday night as they fought back from being 4-1 down, securing the two points that ended their difficult run of results throughout December.

Ryan Aldridge stuck by #31 Sam Gospel between the pipes with the rest of the starting six made up by captain #12 Kieran Brown, #37 Matt Barron, #9 Jordan Buesa, #54 Noah McMullin and #14 Lewis Baldwin.

Gospel was forced to make two early stops before the Knights settled into the game, taking control as they applied the pressure to the Steeldogs' defencemen.

The Howlett - Haywood - Endicott line combined twice in the first period to give the Knights a well-deserved lead after a dominant performance.

The deadlock was broken at 4:59 with #41 Oli Endicott playing the pass through to #95 Mac Howlett who shot past Zimozdra in net for the Steeldogs, causing an eruption from the sold-out crowd at The Castle as the Knights lead in the derby. The goal was assisted by #41 Oli Endicott and #11 Matt Haywood.

Less than three minutes later, at 7:24, #95 Mac Howlett turned provider as he set up #11 Matt Haywood who extended the lead, the second assist going to #8 Bow Neely.

The second period began with a penalty for the Steeldogs as #20 Jonathan Phillips was sent to the Ward Hadaway penalty box receiving a 2+2 for high sticks. At 23:30, #73 Bisonette found himself taking a seat beside Phillips after receiving a two-minute penalty for tripping putting the Knights on a 5on3 powerplay. The Knights couldn't capitalise upon their player advantage with the Steeldogs returning to full strength just before #95 Mac Howlett and #56 Lee Haywood both received two-minute minors for slashing at 26:16.

The third of the night came at 27:53 after #37 Matt Barron's backhand pass found Yorkshire's Sports Performer of the Year, #12 Kieran Brown, wide open at the back post, sliding it home with the second assist going to #9 Jordan Buesa as the lead was extended to 3-0.

#12 Kieran Brown doubled his tally with a second goal at 32:05 after #9 Jordan Buesa drove down the right wing, sending the puck across the ice to his captain who fired past an out of position Zimozdra to make it four.

The Knights entered the third period with a 4-0 lead, but the Steeldogs were able to claim one back, reducing the deficit at 44:07 as #19 Brownley beat Gospel in net, assisted by #56 Haywood.

It was a quick response from the hosts who claimed their fifth goal courtesy of #37 Matt Barron at 47:07. #14 Lewis Baldwin sent #54 Noah McMullin through centre ice with the defenceman laying the puck off to #12 Kieran Brown who found #37 Matt Barron with the Canadian import firing a shot into the top corner to seal the victory.

#3 Bailey Perre sat two minutes for interference at 53:00 sending the Steeldogs on the powerplay but there wasn't enough time left for the visitors to create any damage with the Knights claiming the two points that sends them level on points at the top of the NIHL National table with MK Lightning.

The Thermos sponsored MVPs were awarded to #19 Brownley for the visitors, and to #54 Noah McMullin for the Knights with a strong defensive performance and incredible assist on the fifth goal seeing the Leeds Knights end 2023 at The Castle on a high.

Match report written by Emily Laycock