

## Leeds Knights 7-5 Bristol Pitbulls: Knights bounce back as Harrison Walker gets his first win of the year in between the pipes for Leeds (14<sup>th</sup> January 2023)

After a difficult defeat on the road against Solway Sharks on Saturday night after a penalty shootout, the Morley Glass Leeds Knights looked to bounce back at The Castle on Sunday evening as they hosted Bristol Pitbulls. The last two meetings between the sides saw the Knights victorious on both occasions with a 7-3 win away from home, followed by a 5-0 win in the team's first home game of the 23/24 season.

The Knights lined up with a squad of 19+2 including #91 Jake Witkowski who was making his second debut at The Castle after rejoining the team mid-week, with the Pitbulls icing with a squad of 15+2, opting for #21 Ben Norton in net. Leading the Knights out for their first Sunday night home game of 2024, #32 Harrison Walker started in between the pipes for Leeds with the remainder of the starting six made up of #54 Noah McMullin, #14 Lewis Baldwin, #41 Oli Endicott, #33 Finn Bradon and #19 Innes Gallacher.

Walker was immediately tested by the visitors as #93 Butler and #89 Feasey combined to force a glove save from the Knights goalie before the puck was straight down the other end with #91 Jake Witkowski trying to capitalise upon a spilled save from Norton. #95 Mac Howlett tried his luck shortly after in a congested crease followed by #8 Bow Neely collecting the puck, but he struggled to get a shot off as the Pitbulls defencemen frantically tried to clear the danger.

The Knights were sent on their first powerplay of the night at 2:08 when #19 Elliot Lewis received a two-minute penalty for tripping, but they were unable to punish the visitors early despite a shot from #41 Oli Endicott and a shot from distance from #54 Noah McMullin that forced a glove save from Norton.

As the Pitbulls returned to full strength having survived the penalty kill, #41 Oli Endicott found himself in the perfect position to take a shot as #21 Ben Norton left the back door wide open, but he was denied by the post much to the Pitbulls delight.

Only seconds later, scoring his first goal on home ice, #19 Innes Gallacher opened the scoring at 4:45 with his shot off the post finding the back of the net, assisted by #33 Finn Bradon and #44 Jordan Griffin as the Knights took the lead.

Quickly attempting to level the game, the Pitbulls surged forwards with #11 Sean Morris tapping the puck past Walker following a pass sent in from behind the icing line at 5:57, assisted by #88 Juha Lindgren and #93 Tanner Butler.

The Knights regained puck possession and looked to restore their lead as they played into the offensive zone but were unable to convert their chances. At 10:54 the hosts were given another powerplay opportunity when #23 Jacob White-Sey was sent to the penalty box for holding.

With ten seconds left on the powerplay, #8 Bow Neely fired a shot towards goal, but Norton blocked it allowing the Pitbulls to return to full strength unscathed having handled the pressure from the Knights well. Despite fending off the Knights whilst on the penalty kill, the level score didn't remain for long with a shot from Witkowski tapped past Norton by #11 Matt Haywood at 12:59 giving Leeds a 2-1 lead. #91 Jake Witkowski got an assist on his second home debut whilst #33 Finn Bradon added another assist to his tally for the night.

More pressure from the Knights drew a two-minute penalty for hooking against #16 Jay Warren sending the visitors on their third penalty kill of the evening, and this time they weren't so lucky to escape with Knights captain, #12 Kieran Brown, scoring a powerplay goal at 18:44. A powerful hit sent the puck flying past the Pitbulls defencemen and past Norton in goal, assisted by #8 Bow Neely and #9 Jordan Buesa.

The final minute of the period saw the Pitbulls attempt to claw one back, but Walker stood tall to deny the visitors and gave his team a well-deserved 3-1 lead at the end of the first period.

A two-minute penalty against #23 Jacob White-Sey for tripping at 22:13 sent the Knights on an early powerplay at the start of the second period. Despite having numerous shots blocked by Norton, Leeds kept applying the pressure in the offensive zone and were soon reaping the rewards of doing so when the puck fell to an unmarked #11 Matt Haywood who fired the puck into the top corner for his second goal of the night at 23:56. The goal was assisted by #8 Bow Neely and #95 Mac Howlett with the powerplay goal extending the Knights' lead to 4-1.

Continuing to test the Pitbulls' defence, #2 James Archer took a shot at 25:58 but it was blocked by Norton and Archer was unable to control the rebound giving the Pitbulls time to clear the danger. #9 Jordan Buesa tried his luck at 27:07 forcing a glove save from Norton, before #14 Lewis Baldwin took a shot from range with nobody there to collect the rebound. With the puck predominantly in the Pitbulls' defensive zone, the intensity was certainly increasing as the Team GB U20s goalie was being ferociously tested, fighting to keep his team in the game.

At 31:09, #14 Lewis Baldwin headed to the Ward Hadaway penalty box for slashing sending the visitors on their first powerplay of the night, an opportunity they capitalised upon at 32:37 as #89 Brennan Feasey reduced the deficit by one, assisted by #77 Harewood.

Returning to full strength, #12 Kieran Brown restored the Knights' three-goal lead at 38:21 with a powerful hit past Norton at the near post, doubling his tally, assisted by #54 Noah McMullin and #9 Jordan Buesa.

As the buzzer sounded to indicate the end of the second period, Pitbulls forward #89 Brennan Feasey took a shot which led to the dropping of gloves with penalties to follow at the start of the third period. #9 Jordan Buesa sat five minutes for fighting alongside #44 Jordan Griffin who received five minutes for fighting and a two-minute minor, whilst the visitors saw #89 Feasey receive five minutes for fighting and #77 Harewood also sit five for fighting.

With the penalties cancelling each other out, the Pitbulls began the second period on the powerplay, but the Knights defended well until they returned to five skaters.

At 47:52 the gloves were off again with #95 Mac Howlett receiving a two-minute minor for tripping and a five-minute major for fighting, with #55 Kyle Pow also receiving five for fighting.

This was shortly followed by #9 Jordan Buesa and #89 Feasey both receiving two-minutes for cross checking.

The visitors pushed back as it entered the final ten minutes of the game and it was an even strength goal at 51:51 as #4 Adam Harding slotted the puck into the bottom right corner assisted by #11 Sean Morris and #88 Lindgren that saw the Knights' lead reduced to two.

It wasn't long before the puck rippled the back of the net again in the Knights' favour as #54 Noah McMullin thundered down the middle taking advantage of the space and time he was granted before shooting past Norton on the right at 52:41. The goal was assisted by #9 Jordan Buesa - his third of the night - and #12 Kieran Brown.

A penalty against #12 Kieran Brown for holding at 55:21 sent Leeds on the penalty kill but this did not reduce their attacking intent with #9 Jordan Buesa breaking away and firing into the top left corner with an unassisted shorthanded goal at 56:27.

It was two goals in quick succession at the end of the third period for the Pitbulls with their second powerplay goal of the night scored at 57:17 courtesy of #91 Mason Lipsey, assisted by #51 Cochrane and #88 Lindgren, and with #12 Edgars Landsbergs getting in on the action at 59:23 with a goal that brought the final period to a close.

A physical battle at The Castle ended 7-5 with the Knights taking the two points and Harrison Walker earning his first win of the year in between the pipes for Leeds. The Thermos sponsored MVPs were awarded to #88 Juha Lindgren for the visitors, and #33 Finn Bradon for the Knights after a brilliant performance that saw him add two assists to his tally.

*Match report written by Emily Laycock*