

## Leeds Knights 4-1 Raiders IHC: Knights back to winning ways upon return to league action (3<sup>rd</sup> January 2024)

It was back to winning ways on Saturday night at The Castle for the Morley Glass Leeds Knights as they returned to league action hosting Raiders IHC. Bouncing back from consecutive defeats in the National Cup Semi-Final against Hull during the week, the Knights beat Romford 4-1 with goals from #9 Jordan Buesa, #37 Matt Barron, #12 Kieran Brown and #33 Finn Bradon, maintaining their top spot in the league standings.

### Last time round

The Knights have come up against the Raiders twice already this season and were victorious on both occasions. Away from home on November 11th, Leeds secured a 6-4 win with goals from Mac Howlett, Josh Adkins, and a brace each for Matt Haywood and Kieran Brown, with the second game of the double header on November 12th seeing the Knights make it a four-point weekend courtesy of goals from Mac Howlett, Jordan Buesa, James Archer, and a brace each for Kieran Brown and Josh Adkins.

### First period (1-1)

Romford travelled with a squad of 15+2 opting for #39 Ethan James in between the pipes, whilst the Knights iced with a squad of 19+2, welcoming #24 Dylan Hehir back and starting with the trusted #31 Sam Gospel in net. Aldridge's starting six consisted of #54 Noah McMullin, #14 Lewis Baldwin, #41 Oli Endicott, #33 Finn Bradon and #19 Innes Gallacher joining Gospel on the ice as the hosts won the opening face-off.



A strong start to their return to league action saw the Knights take the lead at 3:12 after their early control of possession was rewarded - #9 Jordan Buesa found the back of the net as he fired past #39 Ethan James, assisted by #37 Matt Barron and #41 Oli Endicott. The intensity didn't fade as #44 Jordan Griffin found himself in a position to take a shot at 4:18 with #2 James Archer creating a chance for #11 Matt Haywood to tap past James just 17 seconds later.

The Raiders headed into the Knights' defensive zone at 6:37 with #81 Adam Laishram forcing Gospel to make the block. The visitors looked to cause trouble again at 8:29, but Haywood did well to track the forward, deterring him for long enough to allow Gospel to claim the puck and diffuse the chance.

Back on the front foot, the hosts charged forwards as they sought to double their advantage. #14 Lewis Baldwin struck a powerful shot through traffic at 8:55 with the Raiders goalie reaching to the left to make a glove save to deny him. #12 Kieran Brown went close shortly after as he worked the puck past the visitors' defencemen before shooting through the legs of #91 Coy Prevost, the Romford netminder doing just enough to push the danger away temporarily. #33 Matt Barron collected the puck behind the visitors' net as he tried to tip

the puck around the post, but he was denied by the pads of James. The Canadian forward tried again, determined to beat James, but his shot was stopped once again by the netminder who stood tall to keep the score at 1-0.

At 10:38, #9 Jordan Buesa received two-minutes for roughing whilst #91 Coy Prevost sat two-minutes for holding with the coinciding penalties meaning the play remained five-on-five. Leeds continued to apply the pressure but couldn't find a way past James. A two-minute penalty against #19 Innes Gallacher for boarding and a two-minute minor against #41 Oli Endicott for roughing coincided with #21 Callum Wells receiving two-plus-two for roughing for the Raiders at 12:01.

#54 Noah McMullin was forced to sit two-minutes for delay of game at 12:05 sending the visitors on the powerplay. However, it was the Knights with the closest chance to score despite the Raiders possessing the player advantage as Barron and Brown darted forwards, the latter of which struck a shorthanded shot that was saved by James at 12:58.

The Raiders then began on the attack as #81 Adam Laishram called Gospel into action, the Knights goalie comfortably making the glove save as the penalty was killed and Leeds returned to five skaters. With five minutes in the first period remaining, the hosts continued to pile on the pressure in the offensive zone with #54 Noah McMullin forcing a save from James at 15:09, and #44 Jordan Griffin producing consecutive shots that were excellently blocked to deny the Knights from extending their lead.

Catching them on the break, the Raiders cancelled out Buesa's opening goal with a backhanded effort from #98 Tjay Anderson ripping the back of the net despite the constant Leeds pressure, levelling the score as the first period ended.



### Second period (2-1)

A strong start to the second period saw the Knights create chances for Buesa and Haywood - James' glove denied the former who shot from the right with Haywood's attempt to lift the puck past James at his near post also blocked at 21:45.

A youthful and energetic line consisting of #41 Oli Endicott, #33 Finn Bradon and #19 Innes Gallacher brought a buzz of excitement to The Castle as they looked dangerous on the attack and seemed sure to worry the visitors in defence. Bradon went close at 23:00, his effort rebounding off James and slipping past the waiting sticks of Gallacher and Endicott. #95 Mac Howlett collected the puck on the right at 24:18, dancing through the Raiders' defencemen and unleashing a shot that went high of the goal.

#9 Jordan Buesa's slapshot from the left at 26:37 was met by the body of James who managed to deflect the puck into the side netting and behind his goal with the Romford defence clearing the danger further.

#11 Matt Haywood and #95 Mac Howlett linked up at 27:47 to create another dangerous chance, the former playing the puck across the face of goal, but it couldn't be tapped past James.

A penalty against the Knights saw #33 Finn Bradon receive two-minutes for tripping at 28:33 sending the visitors on another powerplay. #91 Coy Prevost sat two-minutes for hooking at 30:01 with the game to be played four-on-four for 30 seconds. Both teams returned to full strength with Leeds still in search of the goal to reinstate their lead. #8 Bow Neely went close with a slapshot blocked by the pads of James before #44 Jordan Griffin also tried his luck but was denied.

The Raiders started to apply the pressure in the Knights' defensive zone as the second period entered the final five minutes with #91 Coy Prevost's slapshot going wide and Gospel blocking the following shot, keeping the score level. At 35:06, the Leeds netminder made a massive save to deny the Raiders as they came one-on-one with him, followed by #98 Tjay Anderson firing a shot through traffic at 35:38.

Relieving the pressure off Gospel, #12 Kieran Brown directed a shot at James from a face-off in the offensive zone, but the netminder comfortably caught the attempt with Brown's next shot fired high at 37:28. #33 Finn Bradon battled for the puck at 38:37 before playing the pass to #41 Oli Endicott but he couldn't get a shot away before he was dispossessed.

After lots of missed chances but equally lots of grit and determination, the Knights restored their lead with a Canadian link-up - #54 Noah McMullin played the puck from the left across to the arriving #37 Matt Barron who tapped it past #39 Ethan James at 39:06, the second assist going to #12 Kieran Brown as the hosts took a one-goal lead into the third period.



### Third period (4-1)

An early powerplay opportunity for the Raiders presented itself when #14 Lewis Baldwin received two-minutes for tripping at 42:55. It was #12 Kieran Brown on the breakaway with another chance at a shorthanded goal denied by James at 44:50 who made himself big to prevent the Leeds captain from burying the puck in the back of the net.

Having returned to full strength unscathed thanks to merciless defensive work and important saves made by Gospel, the Knights still had to be alert in their defensive zone as the Raiders looked to come back and level the score once more. Excellent work from #33 Finn Bradon saw him dispossess the visitors in the slot, attempting to work the puck forwards in search of a third goal.

Bradon went close at 51:41 with the puck being played to him right in front of goal, but it was just taken off the end of his stick by #81 Adam Laishram before he could get a clear shot away.

At 53:54, #12 Kieran Brown extended the Knights' lead to two with a shot fired into the top right corner of the net, assisted by #37 Matt Barron and #8 Bow Neely, and only a minute later, #33 Finn Bradon was extending it to four with a well-deserved goal at 54:55. #41 Oli Endicott started the move before playing the puck to #19 Innes Gallacher who drove from the neutral zone, down the left flank, pulling it back to #41 Oli Endicott whose shot was deflected into the path of #33 Finn Bradon to tap home.

After an impressive third period, the Knights came away with the two points and returned to winning ways at The Castle. Despite it being a close game, they got the job done and retained their position at the top of the table as #37 Matt Barron earned himself another man of the match award with the game-winning goal. The Knights will come up against the Raiders next Friday in what will be the first of another three-game weekend.

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