

Leeds Knights 7-2 Peterborough Phantoms: Dominant display on home ice secures the two points (17th February 2024)

The first game of the double-header with Peterborough Phantoms started on home ice for the Morley Glass Leeds Knights on Saturday evening. The hosts were coming into the game on the back of a dominant 6-0 victory over Telford Tigers at The Castle on Sunday that ended their three-game weekend with four out of a possible six points. The visitors travelled having had a four-point weekend with an OT victory over Telford Tigers away from home, followed by a home victory over the Bees.

Last time round

When the Peterborough Phantoms were last in town, it was the opening game of another double-header weekend, and the Knights took the two points to maintain their position at the top of the NIHL table. The scoring was opened by #95 Mac Howlett at 7:43 with the forward doubling his tally and the Knights' advantage at 10:08 before completing his hat-trick early in the second period with a shorthanded goal as the Knights successfully killed #3 Bailey Perre's two-minute minor for hooking. #8 Bow Neely extended the lead to four with #95 Mac Howlett turning provider with a backhanded pass across the crease but increased pressure from the visitors who looked to claw one back before the break saw #19 Luke Ferrara slip one past #31 Sam Gospel on the breakaway. It was a quick response from the Knights to reinstate their four-goal lead as #37 Matt Barron tapped it home at the back post after good work from the captain, #12 Kieran Brown. It was two late consolation goals in the third period for the Phantoms with #24 Mitchell-King scoring on the powerplay after a scramble in front of net, followed by #91 Lukas Sladkovsky collecting a rebounded puck to make it three, but the Knights were victorious.

First period (3-0)

Lining up with a squad of 18+2, the Knights were without #3 Bailey Perre and #19 Innes Gallacher, but saw the return of #26 Tommy Spraggon and #91 Jake Witkowski with the visitors icing with a squad of 17+2 opting for #42 Tyler De La Bertouche in between the pipes.



A starting six of #54 Noah McMullin, #14 Lewis Baldwin, #12 Kieran Brown, #33 Finn Bradon and #37 Matt Barron were led out by #31 Sam Gospel who started in net as the game got underway.

An early chance for #12 Kieran Brown was quickly overshadowed by a sequence of saves from #31 Sam Gospel who dealt with the Phantoms' pressure well. #2 Tom Norton tried to squeeze it past the netminder at the back door before the Knights were on the penalty kill as #9 Jordan Buesa sat two-minutes for high sticks at 2:04.

The most notable chances whilst the visitors were on the powerplay came in favour of the hosts with two chances to break shorthanded - one for the captain #12 Kieran Brown, and one for #95 Mac Howlett. The Phantoms tried a shot through traffic but saw it blocked as the Knights returned to full strength with the score still level.

At 5:40, #8 Bow Neely forced a pad save from #42 Tyler De La Bertouche before #91 Jake Witkowski's shot went high and his combination with #9 Jordan Buesa at 6:36 forced the Phantoms netminder to collect the puck to deny them.

The Knights were then sent on the powerplay as #13 Connor Glossop received two-minutes for boarding at 7:09. #12 Kieran Brown had the first chance to capitalise upon the player advantage before #41 Oli Endicott tried to collect the rebound off De La Bertouche's pads, but it was #95 Mac Howlett who found a way to open the scoring at 8:53. The man with a hat-trick on home ice last weekend tipped the puck past #42 Tyler De La Bertouche at the near post, assisted by #8 Bow Neely and #11 Matt Haywood, with the powerplay goal giving the hosts a deserved lead at The Castle.

Continuing to dominate possession and look threatening in the offensive zone, the Knights burst forwards again with #33 Finn Bradon looking to test the Phantoms netminder this time before #91 Jake Witkowski saw his shot blocked by De La Bertouche's chest at 11:35. The advantage was doubled at 12:23 when a floating shot from #81 Louis Colvin was tipped into the Phantoms net by #9 Jordan Buesa, doubling the advantage with the second assist going to #91 Jake Witkowski.

#41 Oli Endicott was close to getting his name on the scoresheet at 13:35 as the hosts worked the puck back into Peterborough's third but his shot was high of the net. #14 Lewis Baldwin didn't make Knights fans inside The Castle wait long for the third goal of the night as he shot through traffic from the point at 13:43, his effort rippling the back of the net assisted by #41 Oli Endicott and #33 Finn Bradon.

Trying to ease the pressure on their defence for a moment, the visitors looked to test the Knights' composure at 14:13 as they created a chance that was comfortably collected by #31 Sam Gospel. The rare spell of possession didn't end there as a shot from distance caused Gospel to make the block with his pads at 16:10 before making a high glove save at 16:21 to keep the Phantoms out.



An incredible chance to make it four fell to #11 Matt Haywood with just three minutes of the period left to play. #91 Jake Witkowski worked the puck down the left flank before playing it to Haywood in front of goal, but the forward fired the chance into the netminder's chest with nobody able to collect the rebound.

A penalty against #38 Duncan Speirs for hooking at 19:11 sent the Knights on the powerplay and #54 Noah McMullin went close to capitalising upon the player advantage early, but his shot through traffic was sent wide

before #33 Matt Barron had the final Knights chance of the period - however, he couldn't work the puck around #42 Tyler De La Bertouche and the puck was sent wide.

Three seconds before the buzzer sounded at 19:57, #19 Luke Ferrara received two-minutes for boarding bringing the period to a close with Leeds possessing a three-goal advantage after controlling the first 20-minutes in LS11.

Second period (4-0)

With the penalties for Speirs and Ferrara late in the first period meaning the second period started five-on-three, #91 Jake Witkowski wasted no time adding his name to the scoresheet with a goal just 13 seconds in. Assisted by #12 Kieran Brown and #11 Matt Haywood, Jake slipped the first shot of the period past #42 Tyler De La Bertouche to make it 4-0.

The dominance of the first period was carried into the second by the Knights as they piled on the pressure. #41 Oli Endicott won possession of the puck on the left before weaving his way into the centre, but he was unable to get his shot off as a Phantom skate cleared the danger. The danger was only cleared temporarily though as #33 Finn Bradon's shot was blocked by #42 Tyler De La Bertouche with #95 Mac Howlett only able to tap the rebound back into the netminder's grasp at 23:45.

A penalty for interference against #14 Lewis Baldwin at 25:35 sent the visitors on the powerplay, but #95 Mac Howlett tried to break shorthanded at 26:30 before Gospel was forced to block #96 Jarvis Hunt's shot. As the Knights returned to full strength unscathed, #8 Bow Neely began yet another Leeds attack with his first chance, a shot through traffic, blocked and his second rattling the crossbar at 30:30.

The captain #12 Kieran Brown tried to feed #33 Finn Bradon at 31:01 in what was an incredibly close chance, but the latter's shot was captured by the glove of #42 Tyler De La Bertouche. A powerful shot from #81 Louis Colvin at 31:45 forced the netminder to make another important block with tensions then rising leading to #2 James Archer receiving two-minutes for delay of game and #35 receiving two-minutes for interference at 33:43 - the penalties were coincidental and play remained five-on-five.



#91 Jake Witkowski continued his hot start back on the ice as he worked hard to win possession with his pass across the crease from the right at 34:35 going just too fast for #11 Matt Haywood to tap into the net. The attack didn't slow down as #8 Bow Neely forced #42 Tyler De La Bertouche to make another pad save at 35:49 followed by #9 Jordan Buesa testing him once more, but the goalie managed to collect keeping the score at 3-0.

A rare chance to challenge the defence of the hosts came for the Phantoms shortly after as they broke forwards after a face-off in their defensive zone, but nothing came of the chance as Leeds regained possession and took back their control of the game. At 37:02, #9 Jordan Buesa received two-minutes for high sticks quickly followed

by #31 Sam Gospel receiving two-minutes for tripping at 37:19 - served by #41 Oli Endicott - sending the visitors on a five-on-three powerplay.

Despite his view being constantly blocked, #31 Sam Gospel prevented the visitors from opening their account with important saves to kill the penalty. The Knights worked hard to clear their lines until they returned to four skaters with the Phantoms only able to shoot their chances high over Gospel's net and by 39:19 the hosts had returned to five skaters having successfully killed both penalties. The period ended with the Knights having extended their lead by one-goal with #91 Jake Witkowski's goal just 13 seconds in.

Third period (7-2)

It was a change of netminders for Leeds Knights as the third period began as #31 Sam Gospel made way for #32 Harrison Walker.

It took #12 Kieran Brown only 45 seconds to find the back of the net and extend the lead to five, assisted by #33 Finn Bradon for his second of the night and #24 Dylan Hehir. 40 seconds later, #91 Jake Witkowski scored his brace causing an eruption of celebrations inside The Castle, assisted once again by #24 Dylan Hehir.

Leeds' quick start put them 6-0 up with less than 20-minutes to play, but there was still defensive work to be done as #32 Harrison Walker made the catch at 45:20 before collecting the puck after a shot from the right at 46:17 to deny the visitors a way back into the game.

Still searching for a way to turn the game around, Peterborough continued to work the puck forwards with Walker called upon at 47:01 to make the block before the visitors were sent on the powerplay at 47:19 as #6 Ethan Hehir sat two-minutes for slashing. #95 Mac Howlett tried to break shorthanded but was dispossessed.

The Knights returned to full strength unscathed, but then conceded at 50:01 as #90 Leo Markey found a way past #32 Harrison Walker with a shot through traffic to net the visitors' first goal of the night, assisted by #13 Connor Glossop and #8 Louie Kynaston.

Reliving the pressure on Walker momentarily, #42 Tyler De La Bertouche was forced to make a catch at 51:49 before #44 Jordan Griffin was testing him with a shot at 52:20 and #91 Jake Witkowski following suit at 53:05 - the Knights weren't settling for six.

At 53:26, #35 Joe Gretton received two-minutes for holding sending the Knights on the powerplay. #12 Kieran Brown's slapshot at 54:50 went high of #42 Tyler De La Bertouche's goal with #9 Jordan Buesa then receiving two-minutes for cross-checking at 55:01. Returning to full strength, the visitors scored their second of the night at 55:47 courtesy of #19 Luke Ferrara with the powerplay goal reducing the deficit to four.

With less than five minutes left to play, #12 Kieran Brown and #2 Tom Norton dropped the gloves, and both received five-minutes for fighting at 56:13, ending their involvement in the game.

It was a tough final two minutes for #32 Harrison Walker in net as he was forced to make a catch at 58:07 before blocking a slapshot at 58:34, but once the hosts had possession of the puck again, #81 Louis Colvin floated in another shot from the point - #9 Jordan Buesa took the shot, the rebound of which fell to #2 James Archer to tap home making it 7-2 at 58:54.

A dominant display on home ice brought the Knights a well-deserved two points in the first game of the weekend double-header with the Peterborough Phantoms. The Thermos Sponsored MVPs were awarded to #95 Jasper Foster for the visitors and #91 Jake Witkowski for the hosts with two goals and an assist.

Match report written by Emily Laycock