

Leeds Knights 5-2 Raiders IHC: Six-point weekend rounded off with 50th goal for the captain (25th February 2024)

The Morley Glass Leeds Knights welcomed Romford Raiders to The Castle on Sunday evening for their third game of the weekend. Having been victorious over Yorkshire rivals Hull Seahawks on Thursday followed by an incredible 8-0 victory on the road against the Bristol Pitbulls on Saturday, the Knights returned to home ice looking to make it a six-point weekend - and that they did. The captain recorded his 50th league goal with a shorthanded shot in the second period alongside goals from #91 Jake Witkowski, #11 Matt Haywood, #37 Matt Barron and #6 Ethan Hehir helping the team secure the two points at the top of the table.

Last time round

When the Raiders were last at The Castle in early February, the Knights were victorious with goals from #9 Jordan Buesa, #37 Matt Barron, #12 Kieran Brown and #33 Finn Bradon maintaining the top spot in the league standings.

#9 Jordan Buesa opened the scoring at 3:12 with a goal assisted by #37 Matt Barron and #41 Oli Endicott. The Raiders fought back, but the lead was restored by a Canadian link-up between #54 Noah McMullin and #37 Matt Barron who tapped it past James at 39:06. #12 Kieran Brown extended the lead in third period with a shot into the top corner of the net followed by #33 Finn Bradon making it 4-1 at 54:55 after hard work from the young line; #41 Oli Endicott started the move, playing the puck to #19 Innes Gallacher who drove from the neutral zone, down the left flank, before pulling it back to #41 Oli Endicott whose deflected shot fell into the path of #33 Finn Bradon to tap home.

First period (1-2)

The Knights iced with a squad of 17+2 as #James Archer and #19 Innes Gallacher returned to the line-up whilst the visitors lined up with a squad of 18+2 opting for #39 Ethan James in between the pipes. #31 Sam Gospel led out the home side's starting six of #54 Noah McMullin, #14 Lewis Baldwin, #12 Kieran Brown, #37 Matt Barron and #9 Jordan Buesa.



The opening five minutes were evenly contested with both sides battling for possession of the puck and applying equal pressure as they searched for an early opener. At 2:25, #6 Ethan Hehir pulled the puck back to #41 Oli Endicott who forced #39 Ethan James to make a pad block, sending it wide of the goal to #33 Finn Bradon who was forced back up the ice to the neutral zone by the Raiders defencemen. #95 Mac Howlett saw his shot saved just after with nobody able to capitalise upon the rebound before #91 Jake Witkowski forced another pad block from the Raiders netminder at five-minutes.

Despite the pressure in the offensive zone from the Knights, the visitors were the ones to open the scoring. The initial chance was disallowed after hitting the inside of the post, but they wasted no time reaching the rebound with #24 Zack Milton firing it past Gospel, assisted by #91 Coy Prevost at six-minutes.

Searching for a quick equaliser, the Knights regained possession of the puck and looked to pressurise the Raiders with #41 Oli Endicott forcing #39 Ethan James to make a glove save before getting a chance on the breakaway at 7:48 that James also stopped.



#41 Oli Endicott's attempt at goal resulted in the visitors receiving the first penalty of the night as #21 Callum Wells sat two-minutes for slashing sending the Knights on the powerplay at 7:48. #91 Jake Witkowski unleashed a slapshot from the left, but his effort went high - at 8:41, his determination paid off as he found the back of the net and scored the equalising goal with a shot beating #39 Ethan James, assisted by #54 Noah McMullin and #12 Kieran Brown.

The Raiders returned to full strength and were immediately back on the attack with #21 Callum Wells

forcing Gospel to make a glove save at 9:43 before #24 Zack Milton was eager to double his tally with the Leeds goalie making another good save to deny them. The Raiders forward collected his rebound, working it around the back of the net before sending a pass to #29 Jake Sylvester to tap home at the back door to reinstate their lead at 9:59.

At 14:48, #19 George Norcliffe received two-minutes for elbowing alongside his Raiders teammate #13 Elliott Dewey who sat two-minutes for hooking sending the Knights on a five-on-three powerplay. The Knights couldn't create any really threatening chances despite their two-player advantage, but the visitors did look close to extending their lead with a shorthanded chance that Gospel did well to save.

The visitors returned to full strength having successfully killed the penalty with the first period ending with the Raiders taking a one-goal lead into the remaining 40-minutes despite the Knights registering 12 shots on James.

Second period (3-2)

Looking to get back on level terms quickly after the first intermission, the Knights increased the intensity with a chance falling to #19 Innes Gallacher at 25:57, but his shot from the right was denied entry to the net by the pad of #39 Ethan James.

Both sides were battling for possession of the puck in the neutral zone with neither side able to maintain it for long enough to create any huge chances.

At 28:37, #6 Ethan Hehir tried his luck with a slapshot, but James produced the glove save to prevent him with #91 Jake Witkowski then firing a shot towards the visiting goalie at 30:23 with the rebound unable to be collected by the approaching #95 Mac Howlett.

#24 Dylan Hehir received two-minutes for high sticks at 30:37 sending the Knights on the penalty kill. Some big saves from Gospel and relentless defending saw the hosts emerge unscathed and they were quickly rewarded at

32:59 when #11 Matt Haywood produced a shot from the slot to bring the score level once more, assisted by #95 Mac Howlett and #91 Jake Witkowski.

Penalties for #91 Coy Prevost and #9 Jordan Buesa followed at 36:00 with the former receiving two minutes for roughing and the latter receiving two+two for roughing, sending the Knights on another penalty kill.

#12 Kieran Brown wasn't waiting for his side to return to full strength to apply the pressure on the visitors as he broke forwards shorthanded at 37:58 with his shot hitting the underside of the bar and falling over the line as he reached his 50th league goal of the season. The captain is the fastest player in the league to reach the milestone in the 23/24 season, and it sent the hosts into the third period with the lead.



Third period (5-2)

#41 Oli Endicott received a two-minute minor for roughing late in the second period meaning the Knights started the third with 1:40 on the penalty kill.

Having successfully killed the penalty and returned to full strength, the visitors then received a penalty as #10 Brandon Ayliffe sat two-minutes for slashing at 42:01. #37 Matt Barron doubled the home side's lead with a powerplay goal at the backdoor, assisted by the captain #12 Kieran Brown who fed the puck to his Canadian teammate at 42:40.

#Sam Gospel produced a big save to deny the visitors from bringing the score level at 44:13 before #41 Oli Endicott was on the attack with a brilliant chance to create a two-goal cushion, but he fired the puck at the chest of #39 Ethan James who was able to collect.

As the hosts continuously worked the puck into the offensive zone creating chance after chance to extend their lead, the captain went so close to scoring a brace as he came down the right flank, connecting with a pass across the slot from #33 Matt Barron, but he fired his shot into the side netting despite the backdoor being wide open.

Incredible control of the puck from #41 Oli Endicott working it around the back of James' net set up the Knights' fifth goal. Endicott's shot was blocked by the pads of the Raiders netminder, but the puck ricocheted off and into the path #6 Ethan Hehir on the left-hand side who fired the puck past James, assisted by #41 Oli Endicott and #33 Finn Bradon at 48:22.



#9 Jordan Buesa worked the puck back down into the Raiders' defensive zone with #26 Dylan Hehir forcing James to make a glove save to prevent the home side from yet another goal at 51:23 before a period of pressure from the visitors came with 7-minutes to play that encouraged some strong defending from the league leaders.

The Knights were sent on another powerplay when #8 Brynley Capps sat two-minutes for hooking followed by #54 Noah McMullin receiving two for tripping at 58:19.

Neither side could find the back of the net as the third period came to a close with the Knights victorious in their third game of the weekend. #31 Sam Gospel received man of the match for the second night running - the Knights netminder received it in Bristol after securing a shut-out the previous night.

The Knights travel to Solway on Saturday to face the Sharks before returning to The Castle on Sunday to host Swindon Wildcats.

Match report written by Emily Laycock
Photos taken by MileAShotMedia