

## Hull Seahawks 4-3 Leeds Knights: Yorkshire derby duel (31<sup>st</sup> March 2024)



It was a Yorkshire derby duel at the Hull Ice Arena to end regular season fixtures for the Morley Glass Leeds Knights as they travelled to East Yorkshire on Easter Sunday to face the Hull Seahawks. The two sides will meet again next weekend as their journeys to Coventry begin with the double header opening the first of three weekends of playoff hockey. Leeds will host the Seahawks in LS11 on Friday evening before making the journey back across to Hull on Sunday.

Both Yorkshire teams were coming into the fixture off the back of victories over Solway Sharks. The Knights hosted the Scottish side on Good Friday and were victorious by six goals to three as they sought to keep up a winning momentum despite having already won the league title.

Matty Davies' side had also got the better of the Sharks when they made the trip up north to Solway on Saturday evening. The Seahawks won the game with eight goals scored and only three conceded - the perfect way to bounce back from their mid-week defeat to MK Lightning in the National Cup Final.

### Last time round

The two sides last came up against each other earlier in the month and the Knights got the better of the Seahawks both home and away. The Yorkshire derby double-header began with Leeds claiming a 6-4 win at The Castle with #32 Harrison Walker in net and goals from #91 Jake Witkowski, #11 Matt Haywood, #9 Jordan Buesa and #95 Mac Howlett. When Aldridge's side travelled to the Hull Ice Arena the following day, Walker helped them to victory again with five goals scored and only two conceded as they retrieved another important two points in their chase of a second successive league title.

### First period (3-0)

The Knights travelled with a squad of 18+2 with only one absentee from their home victory on Friday - #19 Innes Gallacher. It was #31 Sam Gospel in between the pipes for the visitors whilst #72 Jordan McLaughlin faced him in the opposing net for the Seahawks who were icing with a squad of 15+2.

Following a touching display of appreciation for former Seahawks and current Knights forward #2 James Archer who will be retiring at the end of this season, the puck was dropped in East Yorkshire for Easter Sunday hockey.



It was end-to-end as the opening five-minutes were played with both sides battling for possession of the puck and chances coming at either end to test the netminders. #12 Kieran Brown was the first player bearing a Knights shirt to go close, but his early attempt was wide and the puck was then in the grasp of the Seahawks who looked to test #31 Sam Gospel with a shot from the left. Hull continued to apply the pressure to the

defence of the league champions with #24 Brock Bartholomew shooting from distance, forcing the goalie to make a stretched glove save.

The puck was then quickly back into the Knights' offensive zone with pressure seeing #91 Jake Witkowski go close to opening the scoring before #9 Jordan Buesa set #81 Louis Colvin up with a chance to score his first goal of the season, but he was denied by the glove of #72 Jordan McLaughlin.

Almost as quickly as it had entered their offensive zone, the puck was back in their defensive zone as the battling nature of the derby ensued with neither side willing to give each other time to create clear-cut chances with the puck. Gospel made a double pad block as it reached the six-minute mark before #14 Lewis Baldwin broke forwards, pulling the puck back into the centre of the slot as he rounded the net, but nobody was there to retrieve it and it was back in the home side's possession as Gospel was to make another save to prevent them from opening the scoring.

It wasn't until #34 Gregor Mills was sent to the penalty box having received two-minutes for holding that a goal could be scored, and it was the hosts who got on the board first. Taking advantage of the powerplay opportunity, Canadian import #96 Owen Sobchak fired the puck into the top corner at 7:50, beating Gospel with the goal assisted by #24 Brock Bartholomew and #11 Finlay Ulrick.

The Knights returned to full strength and were quick to take control of possession as they sought an immediate response through #91 Jake Witkowski and #12 Kieran Brown, but the National Cup finalists defended well and maintained their lead. The biggest chance of the opening ten minutes for the Knights saw #14 Lewis Baldwin send the puck into the centre of the slot from the right to #2 James Archer who was situated right in front of an open net as #41 Oli Endicott blocked McLaughlin's view, drawing him to the left-hand side of his goal, but Archer couldn't find the back of the net and the puck went wide.



Hull then broke forwards through #71 Emil Svec who slated alone into Leeds' defensive zone and doubled the home side's lead at 10:48, assisted by #11 Finlay Ulrick for his second of the night, and #7 Tom Barry. Once again, the Knights sought a quick response, but they were unable to convert their chances. #6 Ethan Hehir collected the puck in the neutral zone before sending #41 Oli Endicott on his way in what was another big chance for Leeds to punish the Seahawks' lack of control in possession; #33 Finn Bradon worked tirelessly to stay on the toes of #11 Finlay Ulrick and when the Sheffield Steelers two-way slipped with the puck, Bradon was taking full advantage of pouncing upon it, but it didn't lead to a goal as Hull remained solid at the back.

#12 Kieran Brown tried to pull the puck back into the slot for #33 Finn Bradon as he thundered forwards with four minutes of the period to play, but the chances just weren't falling in the Knights' favour and a two-minute penalty for Bradon at 16:42 for tripping gave the Seahawks the perfect opportunity to make it three before the first intermission. Gospel initially made good block whilst Leeds were on the penalty kill, but #21 Bobby Chamberlain scored a one-timer at 17:27, assisted by #71 Emil Svec to bring a challenging period of hockey to a close with the East Yorkshire side taking a three-goal advantage into the second period of the derby.

### Second period (3-1)

Coming out for the second period, the Knights looked ready to make a comeback as they worked the puck into their offensive zone, but they were still lacking the finishing product as they were unable to thoroughly test McLaughlin until #9 Jordan Buesa forced the Seahawks' number one to make a glove save.

They were seeing more of the puck than they had in the first period, but Hull matched their intensity and drive, dispossessing them in the neutral zone and working hard to prevent the league champions from finding a way back into the game. The home side burst towards #31 Sam Gospel whenever they were given the opportunity to do so, looking to extend their advantage further, but much to the away fans delight, it remained 3-0.

#33 Finn Bradon was the closest to finding the back of the net as his effort was denied by the post before #95 Mac Howlett worked the puck into the crease but was unable to get a shot off as Seahawks shirts crowded him.

As had been the case in the first period, it wasn't until #22 Jordan Fisher received a two-minute penalty for holding at 30:57, sending the Knights on the powerplay, that a goal was scored. #12 Kieran Brown's shot from distance rebounded off #72 Jordan McLaughlin and into the path of #41 Oli Endicott who was there waiting to slot it home backhanded for a powerplay goal that got the Knights on the scoreboard. The second assist was awarded to #91 Jake Witkowski and the deficit in Hull was reduced to two with just less than eight minutes of the period to play.

Despite an increase in pressure on the Seahawks' defence following Endicott's goal, Leeds couldn't find another goal in the period and the home side managed to maintain their lead heading into the third and final period of the Yorkshire derby.

### Third period (4-3)

#37 Matt Barron got the Knights off to a lightning-fast start with a goal scored only 1:41 seconds into the period; when the puck initially fell to him in the slot, pressure from #74 Lee Bonner forced him to mis-shoot with the puck slipping away to the left, but the Canadian import collected it, working it back to the blue line before playing a one-two with #8 Bow Neely. The defenceman played the puck back to Barron on the right with the import firing his shot into the top far corner, past #72 Jordan McLaughlin.



The hosts didn't allow Leeds to relish in the celebrations of the goal for long though as #71 Emil Svec started a move that would them to reinstate their two-goal advantage. #21 Bobby Chamberlain received the puck at the back door before squaring it to #16 Sam Towner to fire home at 43:08.

#31 Sam Gospel continued to be put under pressure by the Seahawks who looked keen to hold onto their lead with the Knights' number one forced to make a pad block at 43:40 followed by another crucial block to prevent the rebound from his first save from slipping behind him shortly after.

When the Knights managed to finally get a hold of the puck again, they made it count with #91 Jake Witkowski bursting forwards before setting #11 Matt Haywood up to redirect the puck past #72 Jordan McLaughlin and score the visitors' third of the night.

Now a one-goal game, the Knights looked more confident and aggressive in the offensive zone with real pressure put on the home side. #9 Jordan Buesa had a chance at 47:36 before #11 Matt Haywood was close to doubling his tally, but McLaughlin stood tall to deny them.

The captain was next to get into a dangerous position: his first attempt from the right was denied by the Hull netminder, but Brown collected the rebound and recycled the puck before playing a one-two with American import #91 Jake Witkowski who fed him the puck as he skated into the slot - pressure from #11 Finlay Ulrick made him unable to get a shot off and forced him further away from the goal. However, quick thinking from the captain saw him look up and find #54 Noah McMullin skating forwards, but the Canadian import's low shot from the left was blocked by McLaughlin's pads and he couldn't convert the rebound keeping the score and at 4-3.

#9 Jordan Buesa worked hard to keep the pressure on the Seahawks when they had possession of the puck in the neutral zone and his relentless presence on the defenceman forced a sloppy defensive pass across the ice that #95 Mac Howlett was able to pounce on. Howlett burst forwards towards McLaughlin with speed causing an uproar from the away fans who felt a goal could be coming, before squaring the puck to #9 Jordan Buesa, but in the process of making the block, #72 Jordan McLaughlin knocked his net and the whistle was blown.

Coinciding penalties were then given to #6 Ethan Hehir and #91 Nathan Salem after a battle in the Seahawks' defensive zone at 54:14.

Determined to find an equaliser with less than five minutes of the period to play, #12 Kieran Brown didn't give up the offensive pressure as he fired a shot towards McLaughlin with the top corner his intended target, but the goalie tipped it over the net and maintained his side's one-goal lead.

A long shift from the Knights saw plenty of chances to score an equalising goal created, but they just couldn't convert them. With an incredible away support behind them, #33 Finn Bradon continued to battle for possession of the puck. #11 Matt Haywood broke forwards with two-minutes of the period remaining, but he was pushed off before he could get a shot away and the Seahawks then broke into the Knights' defensive zone and forced Gospel to make a save, keeping him alert.

With 1:32 left to play, Ryan Aldridge called a timeout, and #31 Sam Gospel was pulled in favour of an extra skater. However, the sixth skater still couldn't help them find a goal to force the game to overtime with #72 Jordan McLaughlin pulling off incredible saves to deny them and the defence in front of him working hard to block shots, and the buzzer sounded with the Seahawks victorious in this instalment of the Yorkshire derby.

The regular season has now come to an end with attention turning to the playoff fixtures – the journey to Coventry begins now. The Morley Glass Leeds Knights welcome Matty Davies' side back to The Castle on Friday evening in the first playoff fixture before making the trip back to East Yorkshire just two-days later.



*Match report written by Emily Laycock*