

Swindon Wildcats 1-2 Leeds Knights: Harrison Walker leads the Knights to victory on the road (8th March 2024)

The Morley Glass Leeds Knights were back on the road on Friday evening for their first game of a three-game weekend - they were coming up against the Swindon Wildcats again after a battling 9-7 victory over them last Sunday at The Castle, rounding off another four-point weekend.

It was a trip down south to the Link Centre that saw the Knights emerge with another two-points and extend their lead at the top of the NIHL National League table to ten points courtesy of goals from #33 Finn Bradon and #11 Matt Haywood.

First period (1-1)

The Knights were back with #3 Bailey Perre in the squad, but were without #2 James Archer, #19 Innes Gallacher, #26 Tommy Spraggon and #34 Gregor Mills as #32 Harrison Walker led them out in Swindon. The Wildcats were at full strength with #62 Renny Marr in between the pipes.

Swindon applied pressure early to the Knights but created no clear-cut chances and were punished early by the visitors' Triple-B line who opened the scoring at 2:57. #33 Finn Bradon shot from low in the crease to give the Knights the advantage, assisted by #37 Matt Barron.



#32 Harrison Walker was tested for the first time at 4:04 when he was forced to make a pad block to deny the visitors from levelling early before #11 Matt Haywood received a two-minute penalty for hooking at 4:41. Despite being on the powerplay, the Wildcats couldn't work the puck past Walker with #9 Jordan Buesa and #41 Oli Endicott having close chances to score short-handed - Buesa's shot was blocked by Marr with nobody there to collect the rebound, and Oli was denied as the Knights returned to full strength having successfully killed the penalty.

At 7:20, #32 Harrison Walker pulled off a huge breakaway save to maintain his side's lead which was quickly followed by Leeds applying the pressure again in the offensive zone as they searched for a second - #3 Bailey Perre shot from distance in an attempt to trouble #62 Renny Marr, but his shot was blocked with #91 Jake Witkowski's effort then collected by the Swindon goalie. The Wildcats then broke forwards with Walker making another big save at 10:45 and then again at 11:15 as the Knights gave the puck away in the neutral zone.

#19 Aaron Nell marked his return to the Wildcats line-up with a goal at 14:26 - he was given the time and space to fire the puck past Walker and bring the score level, assisted by #89 Tomasz Malisinski and #24 Tyler Plews.

The rest of the period followed suit with the end-to-end fight of the game from Sunday was ever-present at the Link Centre (minus the number of goals) – a Leeds attack would then immediately lead to a Swindon attack and vice versa. #91 Jake Witkowski forced a glove save from #62 Renny Marr with #95 Mac Howlett's speed certainly pressurising the Swindon defencemen into making some quick decisions, before #32 Harrison Walker was making a pad block to deny the hosts their second at 15:35 - the puck rebounded into Swindon's possession with a fast reaction from the Leeds goalie allowing him to collect the puck and diffuse the chance.

Still applying the pressure in their offensive zone, the Wildcats continued to test the Knights' netminder with Walker making save after save - with four minutes of the first period to play, the 21-year-old made the save, but the puck found its way to Shaw who had an opportunity to give Swindon the lead for the first time with what would have been a back door tap in, but Walker denied them again.

#89 Tomasz Malisinski collected the puck in the neutral zone and worked it down centre ice before veering to the left and rounding the net, pulling it back into the slot, but nobody was there to capitalise and the puck fell to a Swindon shirt once again at the back door - Walker made the block. As the end of period buzzer sounded, Swindon finally found the back of the net, but the goal didn't stand and the score remained level heading into the second period.

Second period (1-2)

Leeds began the second 20-minutes on the front foot with #91 Jake Witkowski and #6 Ethan Hehir both having chances, the latter of which couldn't properly get his shot off with #62 Renny Marr untroubled.

Pressure on #32 Harrison Walker five-minutes in saw the goalie called upon to make even more crucial saves as the Wildcats found their groove in the period. They were sent on the powerplay at 27:41 as #9 Jordan Buesa sat two-minutes for tripping. The Knights returned to full strength with Haywood, Howlett, Griffin and Neely working tirelessly to kill the penalty.

#41 Oli Endicott had a close chance to reinstate the Knights' lead at 30:27, but #62 Renny Marr produced the glove save to deny him before #3 Bailey Perre was forcing a pad block - Swindon were straight back on the attack with a period of intense pressure that saw save after save made by #32 Harrison Walker, alongside #3 Bailey Perre and #44 Jordan Griffin putting in the defensive work to make the blocks and attempt to relieve the pressure on Walker. The Wildcats were denied by the bar at 32:10 before #12 Kieran Brown was trying his luck at the other end, shooting just high at 32:32.

At 33:48, Swindon broke one-on-one with #32 Harrison Walker once again producing the breakaway save.



After initial hard work from #91 Jake Witkowski to win the puck, #95 Mac Howlett rounded the net before passing to #11 Matt Haywood who sent the puck flying past #62 Renny Marr and into the back of the net at 34:15 to take the lead. This ignited a spell of pressure from the visitors with #54 Noah McMullin shooting through traffic and #12 Kieran Brown setting up #37 Matt Barron who was waiting in the slot, but neither could extend the advantage further.

The Knights were sent on the powerplay at 37:02 as #27 Russ Cowley sat two-minutes for high sticks, but Aldridge's side couldn't capitalise upon their player advantage with the penalty killed and the buzzer sounding bringing a closely contested second period to an end.

Third period (1-2)

Reminiscent of last Sunday, the third period was end-to-end with both sides creating chances, but this time lacking the finishing product: #95 Mac Howlett tried to slip the puck in at the back door having worked it round Marr's net, but his effort was blocked by the Swindon netminder's pad followed by #12 Kieran Brown's shot meeting the chest of #62 Renny Marr and #91 Jake Witkowski shooting high.

#62 Renny Marr played a long pass up the ice as Swindon broke forwards whilst Leeds changed their lines, but the possession didn't amount to anything and Leeds were then back on the attack themselves.

At 48:10, #41 Oli Endicott received two-minutes for tripping with a huge penalty kill from the Knights following as they fought to maintain their lead: it was an incredible effort from #12 Kieran Brown, #14 Lewis Baldwin, #54 Noah McMullin and #37 Matt Barron to help Walker in denying the Wildcats and they returned to full strength unharmed. Swindon bodies crowded the area in front of Walker as they desperately searched for a goal to tie the game, but the Leeds goalie did well to prevent them despite his view being blocked.

The Wildcats were on the penalty kill themselves at 57:11 as #11 Chris Jones received two-minutes for tripping with a timeout called by the hosts at 59:36. #62 Renny Marr vacated his net for the remaining 15 seconds with Swindon opting for the extra skater, but they ran out of time and the Knights took the win.

It was another two points for the Leeds Knights after a brilliant performance away from home - #32 Harrison Walker was awarded man of the match as he led the team to victory in their first game of a three-game weekend. A double-header against Yorkshire rivals Hull Seahawks beings tonight at The Castle.

Match report written by Emily Laycock