

Hull Seahawks 4-3 Leeds Knights: First-leg of the National Cup Semi-Final (31st January 2024)

Travelling to East Yorkshire on Wednesday evening, the Morley Glass Leeds Knights took on the Hull Seahawks in the first-leg of the National Cup Semi-Final - their first contest in a three-game week. It was a physical encounter, as could be expected from a Yorkshire derby, but the Seahawks came away with the win, taking a one-goal lead into the second-leg that is to be played at The Castle on Friday.

Last time round

The last time the Knights visited the Hull Ice Arena they were victorious with a 5-0 win and a Sam Gospel shutout. #12 Kieran Brown opened the scoring with a shorthanded goal followed by a powerplay goal from #41 Oli Endicott to send the Knights into the first break with a two-goal lead. #95 Mac Howlett fired another shorthanded goal past the Hull netminder before #41 Oli Endicott doubled his tally with a powerplay goal at the backdoor. #37 Matt Barron lit the lamp for the Knights' fifth of the night with the Seahawks not getting a look in on home ice.

First period (2-2)

The hosts lined up with a squad on 17+2 opting for #72 Jordan McLaughlin in between the pipes. Led out by #31 Sam Gospel, the Knights iced with a squad of 16+2 - #19 Innes Gallacher, #24 Dylan Hehir, #26 Tommy Spraggon, #32 Harrison Walker and #91 Jake Witkowski not icing.

Lining up for the opening face-off, Leeds' starting six consisted of #31 Sam Gospel, #54 Noah McMullin, #14 Lewis Baldwin, #12 Kieran Brown, #37 Matt Barron and #95 Mac Howlett. Early pressure from the visitors was quickly rewarded when #12 Kieran Brown opened the scoring at 3:06. Starting off the move in the defensive zone, #3 Bailey Perre played the puck up the ice to #37 Matt Barron who passed to #95 Mac Howlett before assisting the captain #12 Kieran Brown who fired past McLaughlin to give the Knights the lead. The goal was assisted by #95 Mac Howlett and #37 Matt Barron.



Looking to double their advantage early on, Leeds continued to pressurise the Seahawks with #37 Matt Barron working his way up the ice, but he was tripped just in front of goal at 4:35 before he could get a shot away. A couple of close chances for the hosts within the opening seven-minutes called #31 Sam Gospel into action with the netminder making some big saves to maintain his side's lead. Breaking forwards at 8:00, the Seahawks crossed the puck across the face of goal with #41 Oli Endicott doing the defensive work to regain possession of the puck, relieving the pressure by playing the puck up the ice.

A big save from Gospel at 8:55 was quickly glossed over as #91 Nathan Salem scored the equalising goal at 8:59. With #74 Lee Bonner's shot rebounding, the puck fell to Salem who was waiting in front of goal, tapping it home assisted by #7 Tom Barry. The Knights looked to quickly reinstate their lead with Haywood taking a shot, his effort fired across the crease before #54 Noah McMullin took a shot through traffic, the rebound of which fell to #95 Mac Howlett who poked it past McLaughlin, assisted by #54 Noah McMullin and #44 Jordan Griffin at 10:55.

Keeping the puck in the offensive zone, Leeds continued with the chances. A shot from distance forced McLaughlin to make a pad save but the rebound didn't quite fall to #9 Jordan Buesa who was waiting in front of goal, the clearance only going as far as #95 Mac Howlett who fired a shot from the left at the Seahawks netminder who made a glove save to deny him.

At the other end of the ice, #31 Sam Gospel blocked a Seahawks slapshot at 13:29 before making a breakaway save at 14:04 to deny the hosts an equalising goal. Desperate to extend their lead as the period entered the final five-minutes, Leeds were back on the attack forcing a double save from McLaughlin. Howlett played the puck into Brown who couldn't quite control it as Seahawks shirts swarmed him, the danger being cleared by the skate of #94.

Late on in the first period, the Seahawks levelled the score with the puck appearing in the slot for #71 Emil Svec to slide home, timed at 19:48 and assisted by #96 Owen Sobchak and #24 Brock Bartholomew. Despite the visitors taking the lead twice in what was a closely contested first period, the hosts found their way back with two equalising goals to make it even at 20:00.

Second period (4-2)

The second period began with Gospel called upon to make a pad save followed by a glove save as #11 Finlay Ulrick took a shot from distance before the first penalty of the night was given against Leeds for too many men on the ice at 23:03. Good defending saw the Knights emerge from the penalty kill unharmed and go in search of a goal that would restore their lead.

However, it was the Seahawks who would go on to have the closest chances in the following minutes. A massive chance for the hosts to take the lead was denied by the body of #14 Lewis Baldwin who got in the way of the shot before the follow-up chance went wide. At 31:36 Gospel made an incredible save at the end of a shot from distance before Canadian defenceman #54 Noah McMullin was trying to cause upset in the Leeds offensive zone, his shot through traffic blocked by the pads of McLaughlin.

At 32:16, #17 Owen Bruton gave the Seahawks the lead for the first time, tapping home at the back door, assisted by #24 Brock Bartholomew. The Knights were sent on the powerplay at 36:21 when #94 Declan Balmer received two-minutes for high sticks, but the hosts were on an immediate breakaway while short-handed with Gospel making a big save to deny them.

A challenge on McMullin behind Gospel's net saw #74 Lee Bonner receive two-minutes for elbowing and #54 Noah McMullin sit two-minutes for hooking with the game remaining five-on-four for 15 seconds. Returning to full strength, the Seahawks doubled their lead with #71 Emil Svec alone in the slot and slotting past Gospel for the second time, assisted by #11 Finlay Ulrick and #96 Owen Sobchak at 38:52.

With Hull having 20 shots on Gospel and Leeds only registering seven on McLaughlin, the second period ended with the Seahawks taking a two-goal lead into the final period courtesy #17 Owen Bruton and #71 Emil Svec.



Third period (4-3)

Immediate pressure from the Knights as the third period began saw #9 Jordan Buesa have an early shot denied by McLaughlin before #12 Kieran Brown tried his luck at 42:50: the captain tried to slot the puck in at the back door before attempting to tap home the rebound of #37 Matt Barron's shot, but the Seahawks just about managed to fend off the Knights. #6 Ethan Hehir continued to try and ignite Leeds' comeback, but his shot was blocked by McLaughlin - #54 Noah McMullin's shot nearly deflected into the net as the pressure was piled onto the hosts.

Hull tried to break shorthanded on the five-on-three powerplay, but the Knights worked the puck back into the offensive zone quickly, desperate to capitalise upon their player advantage. #12 Kieran Brown sent a firing shot through traffic that went just over the goal, ricocheting off the glass and falling into the path of #95 Mac Howlett who managed to weave the puck past McLaughlin and score his second of the night at 50:08. The goal was unassisted.

Despite the Seahawks being back to full strength, the Knights pressure did not falter as #2 James Archer shot at the Hull netminder followed by #8 Bow Neely striking two shots from distance, neither of which could find their way into the back of the net as the visitors remained in search of the equalising goal.

At 53:19, #12 Kieran Brown sat two-minutes for interference. The Knights successfully killed the penalty with Brown skating straight out of the box and into the action as he thundered forwards, playing the puck across the face of goal to the approaching #9 Jordan Buesa who was just unable to reach the pass. Brown retrieved possession of the puck, weaving past the Hull defencemen on the right as he tried to seek out a route to goal, but was blocked by the body of #96 Owen Sobchak.

#14 Lewis Baldwin forced a glove save from McLaughlin at 56:23 before #95 Mac Howlett found himself with two chances to draw the score level in front of goal as the period entered the final three minutes. #11 Matt Haywood won the face-off in the offensive zone at 58:18, passing to #9 Jordan Buesa who looked to be through on goal, but his shot was blocked by McLaughlin who helped his team hold onto their advantage. Leeds looked more and more likely to score as they prised open the Seahawks' defence, but they couldn't capitalise upon the rebound of #44 Jordan Griffin's shot, nor could #12 Kieran Brown and #95 Mac Howlett find a way into the hosts' net with Hull clearing the danger, the game ending 4-3 in their favour.

A battling game of hockey drew to a close with the Seahawks taking a one-goal lead into the second leg of the National Cup Semi-Final that will be played at The Castle on Friday.

Match report written by Emily Laycock