

Peterborough Phantoms 3-2 Leeds Knights (after penalty shootout): Point on the road in playoffs (13th April 2024)

The Morley Glass Leeds Knights began their second weekend of playoff hockey on the road, travelling to take on the Peterborough Phantoms. Both sides were coming into the game having had four-point weekends in the first weekend of playoffs with back-to-back victories over the Hull Seahawks and Bees IHC respectively.

The home side fought back from two goals down to tie the game in regulation sending it to overtime and then penalties. They defeated the Knights in the penalty shootout with the league champions taking a point back up north as the reverse fixture takes place on Sunday night at The Castle.

During the league season, the Leeds Knights got the better of the Peterborough Phantoms on all six occasions with 34 goals scored and only 12 conceded, but playoff hockey is a different story.

First period (0-0)

Both teams lined up with squads of 17+2 with #33 Jordan Marr starting in net for the hosts, and #31 Sam Gospel taking his usual position in between the pipes for the Knights. The league leaders travelled without #6 Ethan Hehir, #26 Tommy Spraggon and #34 Gregor Mills.

It was end to end pressure from both sides as the opening minutes were played, but neither netminder was properly tested. #12 Kieran Brown left a drop pass for #91 Jake Witkowski at 3:35 but his shot from the right-hand side was blocked by Marr's pads. The young line of Endicott - Bradon - Gallacher then pressurised the Phantoms' defence as they retained a long period of possession in their zone, but the scoring still wasn't opened.

#9 Jordan Buesa sat the first penalty of the game at 4:17 as he received two-minutes for high sticks, sending the Phantoms on the powerplay. The Knights have an 80% penalty kill in the playoffs so far and looked confident in denying the home side an opportunity to score as #95 Mac Howlett tried to break shorthanded, relieving pressure from his defencemen as he controlled the puck in the offensive zone. #5 Ivan Björkly Nordström was denied by #31 Sam Gospel before the goalie made another big save at 5:55 to prevent a shot from the right slipping into his net.

The Knights returned to full strength and were back on the attack with #95 Mac Howlett speeding into the offensive zone, but he was called for offside. The next chance fell in favour of the hosts with #77 Martins Susters firing from the point, forcing Gospel to make the save: the netminder blocked the initial shot but spilt the save with #54 Noah McMullin forced to clear the rebound opportunity.

As the period neared the halfway point, #24 Dyaln Hehir fed a pass to #95 Mac Howlett but the forward's shot was blocked by Marr with the rebound almost falling to #37 Matt Barron - the Canadian import couldn't position himself in time to get a shot off and #2 James Archer's approach at speed knocked the net off as he attempted to poke the puck beyond the Phantoms netminder at the back door.

Increased pressure from the Knights saw Brown then try to feed Witkowski with multiple chances also falling the way of #9 Jordan Buesa, but Marr stood tall to deny them from opening the scoring. As soon as the Phantoms were in possession of the puck, they were trying to slow play down, holding it behind Marr's net as they looked for the pass that could break down Leeds' defence.

#44 Jordan Griffin received two-minutes for tripping at 13:14 with the Phantoms on another powerplay, but the Knights killed the penalty once again despite offensive pressure: a good play from the home side saw the puck

fall to #5 Ivan Björkly Nordström at the back door with the net wide open waiting for him to fire the puck into, but his miss came as a relief to the travelling Leeds support. Gospel then denied #2 Tom Norton, sending the puck to his right with the Knights returning to five skaters and immediately getting back on the attack through #9 Jordan Buesa.

The Knights were doing well to dispossess the Phantoms at any given opportunity in the neutral zone with the chances still coming thick and fast for the visitors: #91 Jake Witkowski fed #12 Kieran Brown the puck, but the captain's shot from the left wing went high of the goal.

After a long period of pressure from the league champions in the Phantoms' defensive zone, they managed to clear the puck and the final two minutes of the period were played. Two chances for the hosts saw Gospel called into action with strong defending from Canadian import Noah McMullin also proving crucial in keeping the score level.

The playoff contest was goalless as the end of period buzzer sounded with both sides creating chances, but Jordan Marr the busier of the two periods as the Knights' attack put them under serious pressure.

Second period (0-2)

The offensive pressure from the Knights was instant as the second period got underway with #91 Jake Witkowski feeding the puck to #11 Matt Haywood who just failed to connect with it in the crease. It didn't take long for the veteran to connect with another pass though as he opened the scoring at 23:35: #12 Kieran Brown started the move, playing the puck from left to right with the intention of finding #91 Jake Witkowski, but the puck deflected off the American import's skate before finding its way to Haywood who fired over the shoulder of Marr with the puck spinning around the inside of the net as the league champions took the lead in Peterborough.

A face-off in the Knights' offensive zone was then won by #33 Finn Bradon with #19 Innes Gallacher shooting wide from distance before the Phantoms were on the attack, looking for an equaliser. #31 Sam Gospel made the save at his near post before the puck was quickly back down the other end with #91 Jake Witkowski picking it up behind Marr's net before trying to wrap around and tuck it in at the near post.

An aggressive forecheck from the Knights enabled them to create chances but they couldn't double their advantage, even as Witkowski tried on the breakaway at 28-minutes. A high glove save from Gospel at the halfway point in the period kept the Knights in the lead with #91 Lukas Sladkovsky the next Phantom to test the visitors, but McMullin was there to defend again.

#19 Innes Gallacher fired multiple shots at Marr but he denied him continuously as he remained the busier of the two netminders with Leeds controlling the puck well. #12 Kieran Brown picked up the puck in the defensive zone at 34-minutes before passing to #91 Jake Witkowski who was pushed off by the Phantoms defence, but the captain was there to recycle possession and take a shot, forcing a glove save from Marr at 34:14.

#91 Lukas Sladkovsky broke one-on-one with Gospel with the netminder collecting the puck as tensions spilt: a two-minute penalty for roughing was given to #41 Oli Endicott at 36:22 with #90 Leo Markey receiving two for roughing and two for slashing for the Phantoms, sending the Knights on the powerplay. The visitors couldn't find a way through until #29 Will Weldon received two-minutes for hooking at 38:03 and it was five-on-three for 20 seconds with the Knights' relentless pressure rewarded as #9 Jordan Buesa found the back of the net: a shot straight from the face-off was tucked under Marr by Buesa at 38:09.

The period ended with the Knights in the lead and a big third period needed from the home side to find a way back into the game.

Third period (2-2)

#77 Martins Susters drove down the right wing as the final 20-minutes commenced, battling well on the boards but he was denied by #33 Finn Bradon, with #91 Lukas Sladkovsky just inches wide from clawing one back with his shot across Gospel a minute in. A series of chances for Endicott, Barron and Witkowski made it difficult for the Phantoms to get a foothold in the period with the visitors attempting long passes when they regained possession of the puck, all of which were intercepted by the visitors until 46:06 when #5 Ivan Björkly Nordström's shot was saved by Gospel, the rebound of which was met by #24 Mitchell-King who fired home into an empty net.

Having reduced the deficit by one, the Phantoms were looking for a quick equaliser as #77 Martins Susters tried to beat Gospel backhanded, but the netminder produced the save at 47:20. #19 Innes Gallacher was then feeding #33 Finn Bradon who broke forwards but shot wide of Marr.

Only three-minutes after third first goal of the game, the home side drew level with #13 Connor Glossop firing a shot at Gospel and #45 Callum Buglass poking it home into the bottom corner through the netminder's legs at 49:04. The Phantoms were close to a third as they broke two-on-one, but Gospel denied Susters at the back door and the Knights were then back on the attack through #3 Bailey Perre who fired from the point but couldn't get the puck past Marr and into the back of the net.

A confident-looking Peterborough side then forced Gospel to make a crucial save at 50:14 at Sladkovsky launched a one-timer towards him as the intensity increased with both sides searching for the fifth goal of the game. It was equal pressure from both sides as the final ten-minutes were played but neither could find the back of the net with chances missed and huge blocks made by the goalies.

At 55:24, a stick to the face saw #54 Noah McMullin go down in front of Gospel with a five+game penalty following for #77 Martin Susters, and #2 James Archer also receiving two-minutes for unsportsmanlike conduct. The Knights were on the powerplay until #9 Jordan Buesa received two-minutes for high sticks at 56:44.

The final minutes of the period were played with Leeds throwing everything at Marr who continued to deny them with the score tied as it reached 60:00 and overtime began.

Leeds looked the more threatening of the two sides in overtime, but Marr continued to block the shots and Gospel worked hard at the other end to prevent the home side from capitalising upon a few breakaway opportunities. The game was to be decided by a penalty shootout.

A comeback victory on home ice was achieved by the Phantoms who got the better of the league leaders on penalties, setting up an exciting reverse fixture at The Castle on Sunday.

Match report written by Emily Laycock

Penalties:

PP - Ivan Björkly Nordström – MISS

LK - Kieran Brown – MISS

PP - Luke Ferrara – GOAL

LK - Matt Haywood – MISS

PP - Lukas Sladkovsky – MISS

LK - Mac Howlett – GOAL

PP - Austin Mitchell-King – GOAL

LK - Jake Witkowski – MISS

PP - Brad Bowering – MISS

LK - Matt Barron - MISS