

AT LAST! LIONS PUT THE BITE ON OXFORD FOR THEIR FIRST VICTORY

THERE was great cause for rejoicing among Lee Valley Lions and their supporters as the club won its first match to jump three places in the English Ice Hockey League table.

Lions were clearly still buoyant from their 7-7 draw against Swindon last week, but they knew that midtable Oxford would be a harder proposition. In addition, they had to rely on just 11 outfield players plus netminder Stefan Nubert.

The game didn't start well for Lions, who soon a goal down in 53

Oxford City Stars 5, Lee Valley Lions 7

seconds, as Andy Cox scored. The goal was scored on a delayed penalty against Romanas Fedotovas, who had to sit out two minutes for slashing.

Undeterred, Lions seized on a powerplay chance just past five minutes and Paul O'Neill scored his first goal of the night, assists coming from Andy Watt and Mark Saunders.

Saunders then put Lions 2-1 up at 12 minutes, assisted by Scott Beeson.

The second period began with

Beeson scoring unassisted at 22:10. Seconds later Oxford clawed back a goal through Patrick Knightley. Six minutes later Oxford's equaliser came from an unfortunate defensive error as the puck slipped past Nubert.

Still Lions were determined to retain their edge and Fedotovas broke away for a fine unassisted goal at 30:23, scored while Lions were short-handed as James Hatfull was serving two minutes for holding.

Hatfull redeemed himself with a powerful slapshot that flew past netminder James Skaife.

Oxford weren't prepared to surren-

der and Dean Francis brought the Stars within a goal of levelling at 36:41.

In the final period, the game was still completely in the balance, although Lions scented that first victory. Grant Hutcheon scored his first point of the season at 50:03, his goal assisted by James Scott-Joseph, also his first point and Andy Watt.

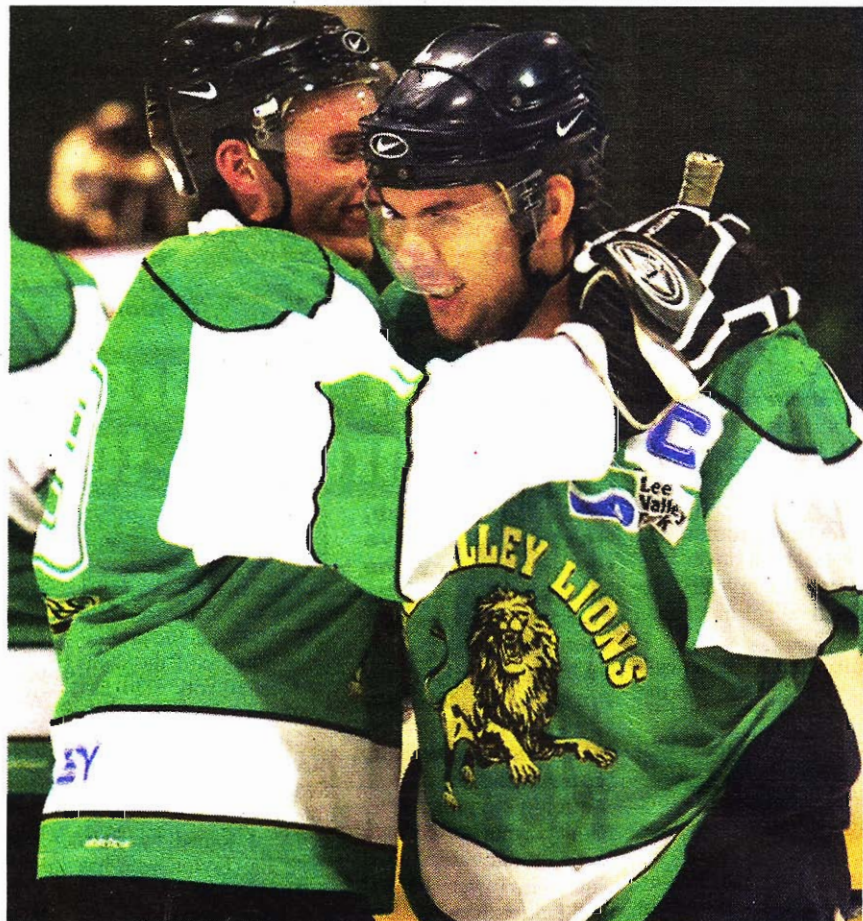
The final 10 minutes was full of excitement and tension, but Lions kept their heads despite conceding a goal at 54:47, which brought Oxford hope of securing something from the game.

Time-outs were called by both teams and Oxford took the step of pulling Skaife out of the net to give them an extra outfield player.

The decision proved costly as O'Neill hit the puck into an empty net from distance to seal the Stars' fate and secured that so elusive first win for the Lions.

Said O'Neill afterwards: "For the first time it all seemed to come together for us. We showed real nerve and when we needed to step up a gear.

This Saturday, Lions entertain Romford Spitfires at the Lee Valley Ice Centre, face-off is at 5.30pm.



THE JOY OF WINNING: Lions' Romanas Fedotovas (left) congratulates teammate James Hatfull after the former's goal.

Picture: Julianne Bonner.