

NORTHANTS BASKETBALL CLUB

PRESS RELEASE

Senior Men stay undefeated

VACARS Division 4 Midlands Conference

Northants "Thunder" 79 -57 Leicester "Warriors II"

The Northants men's team maintained their 100% record with a routine win over the "Leicester "Warriors" second string and continued their charge towards a seeded spot in the Play Offs.

The game was as good as over midway through the second quarter by which time "Thunder" had raced into an unassailable 42-20 lead. During those opening 15 minutes it was clear that "Warriors II" could not cope with "Thunder's" up-tempo style of play, pressure defence and athleticism close to basket; other than that it was a close contest.

In fairness the third and fourth quarters did not make good watching for a large crowd at the Basketball Centre. "Warriors II" adopted a zone defence in order to stop "Thunder" scoring options close to basket while "Thunder" experimented with some new defences. On offence "Thunder" did try to showboat a little with creative passes from Jonny Yates and Jason Tucker but with the exception of a Jacob Holt Ally-Oop this wasn't entirely successful. To their credit the Leicester players stuck to their task and actually won the final quarter 20-17 but the final result was never in doubt.

This was "Thunder's" twelfth Conference game of the season, and in win number twelve their scoring was dominated by Leome Francis and Jacob Holt with 16 and 15 points respectively while Tomas Vladuka contributed 12 points

It's team, team, team all the way as Junior Women beat "Hornets"

Junior Women's Midlands South-West Conference

Bucks "Hornets" 42 – 71 Northants "Lightning"

Stacey Shakespeare the coach of the Northants "Lightning" junior women's team pronounced this, "The best team effort of the season so far". Her pre-game focus was on hard-nosed defence because she felt that in the two previous games against "Hornets" the Bucks team had been allowed to score too many easy baskets.

From the outset of the game the "Lightning" pressure defence proved to be conclusive as "Hornets" found scoring extremely difficult and although the "Lightning" offence wasn't operating particularly smoothly they won all four periods of play taking the third and fourth quarters 37-17 to record a comfortable 29 point win. The win consolidates the team's third place in the Conference table.

The victory was an excellent team effort with all twelve "Lightning" players contributing to the final total. Just one player Steph Ogden with a 20 point haul scored in double figures but the team had proved that, "It's defence that wins games."

Junior Men give table-topping "Magic" a fright

Junior Men's Premier Division North

Northants "Thunder" 60 - 71 Manchester "Magic"

The Northants junior men took on top of the table Manchester "Magic" and came out of the game with a great deal of credit despite being beaten by 11 points. The final result was very much based on an excellent third quarter by "Magic" which they won 28-12 to take a 19 point lead at 61-42. To their credit "Thunder" showed their character by winning the final stanza 18-10 but in fairness the final result was never really in doubt.

The first quarter was a closely fought affair just edged 21-18 by the Manchurians with all the "Thunder" points coming from Linas Bajournas and Matt Yates. "Magic" had been using their famed pressure man-to-man defence but "Thunder" had been able to penetrate this defence on a number of occasions and were

forced to switch to a zone in the second quarter. This proved to be a rather dour low scoring affair edged 12-8 by "Magic" but with a 26-33 half time score line "Thunder" were very much still in the game.

The third period of play proved to be decisive with nine of "Thunder's" 16 points coming from Yates but the team bounced back in the last ten minutes of play with Bajournas playing with typically determination and the Manchester coach was quick to admit that the final score line was rather flattering to his team.

In the 11 point defeat skipper Matt Yates led his side's scoring with 23 points well supported by Bajournas with 19 but no other "Thunder" player could make any significant contribution.

Second set back of the weekend for Junior Men

City of Sheffield "Saints" 79 - 66 Northants "Thunder"

After less than 24 hours rest and 100 miles of motorway travel the Northants junior men were back on court against Sheffield and after scoring the game's opening basket fell behind and trailed for the remainder of the game. Assisted by some lenient refereeing Sheffield "Saints" used an aggressive trapping defence which forced "Thunder" out of their offensive rhythm. For their part "Thunder" were trying to conserve energy by employing a zone defence but "Saints" showed great patience and excellent passing skills to exploit gaps.

By the end of the first quarter the home side had moved into a 25-18 lead but "Thunder" battled back in the second period of play thanks to launching a number of fast breaks reducing the lead to just three points. Unfortunately the Northants boys became a little over confident and were guilty of some poor shot selection which allowed Sheffield to retain dominance and take the period 22-18 and so extend their lead to 47-36 at half time.

This lead was extended by a further three points in the third quarter and when a "Thunder" comeback in the fourth looked to be a possibility "Saints" showed good skills in managing the shot clock. "Thunder" edged the last period of play 17-16 but "Saints" were good value for their 13 point win with several "Thunder" players looking 'dead on their feet'.

For the second day running Matt Yates and Linas Bajournas dominated the scoring with 35 and 10 points respectively and once again no other Northants player could make any significant scoring contribution.

Last two minutes nightmare hurts Cadet Men

Cadet Men's Premier Division North

Northants "Thunder" 77 - 82 Manchester Trafford

With just two minutes of this Cadet Men's Premier Division game remaining Pauli Laurinolli scored for "Thunder" with a put back to take his team to within two points of the young Trafford team at 71-73. There was no doubt that the impetus of the game was no well and truly with the Northants team, but what happened next left players and spectators alike stunned with shock. "Trafford" made two steals, blocked a close to basket shot and forced a rushed perimeter shot. They went on a crucial 7-zero run to take the game beyond the reach of "Thunder" who responded with a 5-2 surge of their own but it was a case of too little too late.

The two teams scored basket for basket throughout the whole game but leading 64-58 early in the final period of play "Thunder" were hit by an 11-zero "Trafford" run but they were able to respond thanks to two Laurinolli breakaway lay ups. Then came that critical two minute spell which left "Thunder" contemplating yet another loss and one which certainly could have been avoided.

The game was very much a contrast in styles with "Thunder" employing zone defences for most of the game while "Trafford" relied on an aggressive man-to-man defence. This defence was successful in forcing a number of turn-overs as not for the first time this season, "Thunder" struggled to advance the ball up court.

In the disappointing five point loss George Paul top scored for "Thunder" with 26 points including five three pointers. Josh Round supported well with 22 points and once again played in three different positions while Laurinolli contributed 14 points.

execute their offence and managed only one field goal in the quarter. Things were made even worse because of some poor free throw shooting and their cause wasn't helped when Grosvenor and Killeya were both forced to leave the game with five fouls.

By now the momentum had swung totally to Nova and with two minutes of the game remaining the Notts guard Burton hit back to back 3 pointers to reduce the lead to five points at 63-58. Coach Crump called his final time-out to regroup the boys, but they continued to turn the ball over so allowing Nova to achieve the unthinkable and overcome an 18 point deficit to lead 66-65. With 14 seconds remaining Carlo Nieva, stole the ball and was fouled whilst driving to the basket. With a chance to put his team back into the lead Nieva made just one of the resulting free throws to tie the scores up at 66 all. Nova had the last offence but spirited "Thunder" defence restricted them to a forced perimeter shot which missed so sending the game into overtime.

Nova continued to press aggressively in overtime and a successful free throw and consecutive lay ups saw the visitors edge out to a 71-66 lead with three minutes remaining and their bench celebrating what they thought was going to be an amazing comeback victory. "Thunder" on the other hand had different ideas and a free throw from Ed Hall and a three pointer from Ollie Thomas cut the deficit to 70-71. Northants were then able to steal the ball leading to Dan Thacker successfully making a lay-up despite being fouled so restoring a 72-71 lead. Back to back scores from Carlo Nieva followed and this confirmed a superb win for the Northants boys and wild celebrations from parents and fans alike.

Despite giving up an 18 point lead Coach Crump was delighted with the win, and his team had shown real character in overtime to overcome the deficit. He recognised that it was a team effort to secure the win, but was particularly complimentary towards the performance of Ed Hall who scored 26 points and provided a strong inside presence. However, Coach was astounded how team had still won the game despite scoring just 16 out of 51 free throws.

Possibly the most important fact was the recognition that this had been an excellent contest played in excellent spirit and enthusiastic support possibly slightly marred by the young Nova fan who felt it necessary to make animal noises during "Thunder" free throws.

In addition to the efforts of Hall; Ollie Thomas and Carlo Nieva both scored 14 points while important contributions came from Jacob Killeya and Will Grosvenor with 12 and 8 points respectively.

The win earns "Thunder" a Play Off place the only male team in the club with the exception of the senior men to achieve this. In the first round they will face City of Birmingham another team from the Midland Conference and a team they have narrowly lost to on two occasions.

Poor final period costs Under 14 Boys dear

Under 14 Boys Midlands Conference

Northants "Thunder"	60 -75	Leicester "Blaze"
----------------------------	---------------	--------------------------

The Northants under 14 boys slipped to another defeat when they came off second best against Leicester "Blaze" but they should a great deal of improvement over other recent losses. "Thunder" were actually well in contention after taking the third period of play 16-11 to tie the scores up at 49 all. "Thunder's" last three points came from rookie Laurence Williams who was felled at the end of the quarter whilst shooting a three-pointer and he then stepped up to the charity stripe to convert all three shots.

So it was game on in the fourth quarter but after edging ahead "Thunder" totally lost their nerve and were guilty of giving the ball away on a number of occasions. This allowed "Blaze" to go on a 14-4 surge to take the game by a rather flattering 15 points.

For "Thunder" eight players contributed to their team's 60 point total led once again by David Nieva who had a 34 point haul.

Under 14 Girls are second best to “Swifts” in a classic

Under 14 Girls Midland South West Conference

Northants “Lightning”

63 – 67

Southend “Swifts”

The pink clad Southend “Swifts” under 14 girls team arrived at the Basketball Centre with a 100% record and they left with that record intact and with a standing ovation ringing in their ears. On the face of it this appears to be yet another routine win for the Essex team but going into the last period of play with “Lightning” leading by six points at 54-48 a shock looked to be on the cards.

To their credit in that final quarter “Swifts” were able to raise the intensity of their defensive play restricting “Lightning” to just nine points whilst making some clutch shots many of them under a great deal of pressure. The game may not have been of the highest technical quality but unlike so many one-sided affairs in this Conference, it was a real contest and well deserving of the acclaim given by a large crowd.

In the four point defeat Caitlin Stewart battled hard for her 23 points and she also pulled down 10 rebounds. Excellent support came from the superb Sarah Round who scored 18 points while Ruchae Walton just missed out on her usual double-double scoring 12 points and hauling down nine rebounds. Coach Goodrich also had a good word for Cat Askham who totalled 10 rebounds.

It’s a breeze for “Lightning”

Norfolk “Incini”

20 – 72

Northants “Lightning”

A day after their disappointing loss to Southend the Northants under 14 girls were on the road to Norwich for a Conference game against Norfolk “Incini” a team that had won just one game this season. The expression ‘chalk and cheese’ come to mind when comparing this game with the previous day’s contest and Coach Karen Goodrich was able to play a number of players who turn up week in and week out for practice but see limited playing time. These players rewarded Goodrich with all twelve of the squad contributing to the scoring.

The “Incini” coach was full of praise for the fact that no effort had been made to embarrass her less experienced players by playing the better “Lightning” players and the game was played in excellent spirit despite the one-sided score line.

For the record Esther Alake top scored for “Lightning” with 14 points while it was business as usual for Ruchae ‘DD’ Walton with 13 points and as many rebounds.

The team face another stern test this Saturday when they tackle the “Angels” of Haringey who last Sunday took away Southend’s unbeaten record.

Under 13 Boys lose to “Cobras” again

Under 13 Boys Midlands Conference

Northants “Thunder”

71 - 118

Bracknell “Cobras”

Having lost to Bracknell away the previous week ago, “Thunder” went into this game hoping to do a bit better at home, but unfortunately it wasn’t to be even though “Cobras” turned up with just seven players.

From the start, the visitors seemed to have no problems finding the basket, whereas “Thunder” missed numerous scoring opportunities. After a disastrous first quarter “Cobras” had rushed out to a 33-7 lead, leaving “Thunder” with a mountain to climb. The Northants boys were more competitive for the next two quarters but Bracknell still managed to extend their lead by a further six points to lead 60-28 at half time.

The two teams exchanged scores throughout the third quarter which was tied at 22 all which meant that “Thunder” were trailing 50-82 going into the last period of play. Coach Mike Round was expecting “Cobras” to tire, but this didn’t happen and three 3-pointers and several fast-breaks off Thunder misses meant that the visitors were able to win the final quarter 36-21 and take a deserved 47 point victory.

As was the case in the previous encounter, Thunder couldn't stop the "Cobras" star player who finished with 47 points and led his team to an impressive total of 118. "Thunder" managed to amass 71 points, but the main differences between the two teams were the shooting percentages and the desire to chase down rebounds. Laurence Williams dominated the offence for Thunder scoring 31 points and Jared Ryan also reached double figures netting 10 points. Encouragingly, nine of the eleven Northants players contributed to the team's total, but Coach Round was disappointed with the result and he and the team will be hoping to make amends in the final game of the season against Reading at home next week.

THIS WEEKEND'S ACTION

Saturday 7th March

10.00am	Junior Women versus Bucks "Hornets"
11.30am	Under 14 Girls versus Haringey "Angels"
12.00 noon	Under 13 Boys versus Reading "Rockets"
1.30pm	Under 15 Girls versus Reading "Rockets"
2.00pm	Junior Women versus Reading "Rockets"
4.00pm	Senior Men v College of West Anglia "Fury"

These six games will be played at the **Northants Basketball Centre** at Northampton School for Girls in Spinney Hill Road, Northampton

Spectators are welcome and admission is **FREE**

Other games on Saturday:

- Junior Men travel to Leicester Warriors
- Cadet Men travel to Cheshire Juniors
- Under 15 Boys travel to City of Birmingham (Play Off 1st Round)
- Under 14 Boys travel to Leicester Warriors (6)
- Under 11's play in the Northants Central Venue League at Northampton School for Boys

Sunday 8th March

- Under 15 Boys travel to Birmingham to play C.O.B. (Play Off 1st Round)