

offence that gave them inside and outside scoring options and a 20-11 score in the “Warrior’s” favour gave them a comfortable 57-43 lead going into the final period and Leaving “Thunder” a mountain to climb.

Fawlihihmi was able to return to the fray for the final stanza and “Thunder” kept battling to the final whistle and only lost the final quarter 19-15, but could not stop the “Warriors” from recording a 76-58 win. It was encouraging to note that all eight players contributed points to the team’s total led by Matt Yates with 17 points and he was well-supported by Luke Lewis who scored 13. “Thunder” will be hoping to overturn this result when the two teams meet again in a week’s time.

Cadet Men snatch defeat from the jaws of victory

Cadet Men’s Premier Division North

Cheshire “Panthers” 72 – 68 Northants “Thunder”

When Pauli Laurinolli scored with a breakaway lay up at the end of the second quarter the scoreboard showed a 47-30 score line in favour of the Northants cadet men. The Northants boys had taken that second period of play 25-13 thanks to a 15-2 charge over the last four minutes of the quarter and the 17 point lead had been achieved by some excellent defence which had forced a number of “Panthers” turn overs and some clinical finishing.

What happened at the start of the third quarter was the thing nightmares are made of. “Panthers” switched to a 1-3-1 and “Thunder” became guilty of poor decision making, poor shot selection and a large dose of complacency. “Panthers” began to score freely against lackadaisical “Thunder” defence forcing Coach John Collins to take his second time out. A switch to a man-to-man defence made no difference and Collins was forced to watch as the Cheshire team went on a 12-2 charge to take a 57-56 lead at the end of the third quarter having taken the period 27-9.

Shocked to their core “Thunder” were far more competitive in the fourth quarter and when George Calvey scored on a trail play they regained the lead at 65-64. On the next play Calvey who had pulled down a dozen rebounds, illegally extended a leg and picked up his fifth foul and fouled out of the game. The two teams exchanged three point shots but down the stretch “Thunder” were unable to find the basket for almost two and a half minutes as “Panthers” were able to take the game by 72 points to 68.

In the disappointing defeat Laurinolli top scored with 32 points. He also pulled down eight rebounds but he wouldn’t have been pleased with a total of 12 losses. The only other “Thunder” player to score in double figures was George Paul who shot superbly in the first half scoring all 20 of his points in those 20 minutes

Blank weekend for Cadette Women and Under 15 Girls

Cadette Women’s Midland, South-West Conference

Northants “Lightning” 20 - 0 Reading “Rockets”

Northants “Lightning Too” 20 – 0 Bucks “Hornets”

At the tail end of the season a number of clubs seem to find it difficult to raise at team and so it proved last Saturday when both the Northants Cadette Women’s and Under 15 Girl’s teams were ‘given’ games. “Lightning” and “Lightning Too” lie 2nd and 4th respectively in the Conference table. The two teams meet this week and dependent on the result those positions may be reversed.

Under 15 Boys fall at the first Play Off hurdle

Under 15 Boys Play Offs 1st Round

City of Birmingham 65 - 46 Northants “Thunder”

A large crowd was present at Dame Elizabeth Cadbury School in Birmingham to watch Midland Conference rivals Northants “Thunder” and City of Birmingham clash in the 1st Round of the Play Offs. It was the home team who took control of the game early on moving out to a 9-2 lead thanks to some strong full court man to man defence. “Thunder” responded with an 8-4 run of their own to get back to 13-10 thanks to scores from Ed Hall and Carlo Nieva and it was Nieva who drew the two teams level at 17 points each with a three pointer late in the quarter.

“Thunder” opened the scoring in the second quarter with Will Grosvenor finding Brendan Ross off a pick and roll, but then a period of sloppy play led to a number of turnovers saw C.O.B. go on a 10-zero run to take a 27-19 lead. After a “Thunder” time out David Nieva, Grosvenor and Hall kept the scoreboard ticking over for the visitors reducing the lead to 32-25. “Thunder” were finding it difficult to score close to basket but, Josh Amiroro and Hall were fouled whilst driving to the basket and they converted the ensuing free throws to get the score back to 34-28 in favour of C.O.B. at half time.

“Thunder” started the third quarter well with a score from Grosvenor, but that would be “Thunder’s” only score in that quarter. The scene was set after that early score as “Thunder” proceeded to miss four lay ups in transition. C.O.B. seemed to derive confidence from these misses and their full court defence became more aggressive causing problems for the “Thunder” ball handlers who turned over the ball over giving the home side easy scores. They went on a 16-0 run to open up a 52-30 and leaving “Thunder” with a mountain to climb.

To their credit “Thunder” refused to give up and actually took the final stanza 16-13 but there was never any realistic chance that they could close the gap and it was C.O.B. that advanced to the 2nd Round of the Play Offs and leaving the “Thunder” players, coaching staff and fans to contemplate that nightmare third period of play.

In the disappointing 19 point defeat “Thunder’s” leading scorers were Carlo Nieva and Ed Hall with 17 and 15 points respectively. Coach Crump was disappointed that his team hadn’t been able to progress to the next round of the playoffs, but felt that their season was a success by securing a place in the play-offs. He was extremely grateful to all the players for their hard work and commitment throughout the season.

Under 14 Boys just miss out on a win

Under 14 Boys Midlands Conference

Leicester “Warriors” 71 - 66 Northants “Thunder”

“Thunder” travelled to Leicester with an eight man squad due to illness and cry offs but the eight that did make the game put in a huge effort but still came off second best. “Thunder” started the game well enough with David Nieva pulling the strings but the “Warriors” team were causing problems with their drives to basket and finished the period 19-12 up.

The second quarter started well for the Northants boy's with two quick baskets from Hayden Sayers cutting the Leicester lead to just three points. “Thunder” continued to dominate the play and by half time were within one point with the score at 32-33. The third period of play saw “Thunder” lose their concentration, allowing Warriors several easy scores. The home side took the quarter 25-26 to lead by ten points at 58-48 going into the last ten minutes of play.

“Thunder” worked tirelessly in the fourth quarter but could make no impact on the Leicester lead. With three minutes to go Coach Mickey Paul instructed his team to start shooting three point shots. The tactic worked perfectly with four consecutive three point attempts catching nothing but string. With the “Warriors” lead cut to just three points their coach was forced to call two time outs in quick succession which did the trick as “Warriors” held on to win the game by 71 points to 66. For “Thunder”, David Nieva scored 38 points, while Reece Zubal and Hayden Sayers contributed 11 and 10 points respectively.

Under 14 Girls are simply superb as they ‘down’ the “Angels”

Under 14 Girls Midland South West Conference

Northants “Lightning” 55 - 41 Haringey “Angels”

In front of an enthusiastic but unaware crowd at the Basketball Centre last Saturday a little piece of history was made with a Northants team beating the mighty Haringey “Angels” for the very first time. The victory was based on an outstanding team defensive performance which saw all the “Lightning” players putting their bodies on the line for each other. In fairness Haringey were without the services of the outstanding Savannah Wilkinson but even so this represented a tremendous achievement by Coach Karen Goodrich’s team.

“Angels” made a lethargic start to the game but the Northants team were unable to capitalise fully and only led 18-11 after the first period of play. There were however, signs that “Lightning” held the ascendancy with Sarah Round looking particularly impressive in the back court. The second and third quarters saw some tremendous “Lightning” ‘help’ defence restricting “Angels” to speculative long-range shots. Meanwhile, through Round and Caitlin Stewart “Lightning” were posing a much more balanced threat and when shots missed the mercurial Ruchae Walton was on hand to pick up the scraps and score with put backs.

In those middle two periods “Lightning” outscored their opponents 29-16 to lead 47-27 going into the final ten minutes of play and Coach Goodrich was able to give all twelve of her players some court time so they could say, “I played in the team that beat Haringey.” “Angels” played with more passion in the final quarter which they won 15-12 but it was a case of too little too late as “Lightning” ran out comfortable winners by 55 points to 41.

In the 14 point win Sarah Round was absolutely outstanding scoring 25 points and playing some hard-nosed defence. Excellent support came from Caitlin Stewart and Ruchae ‘DD’ Walton who both recorded double-doubles. The only worry for Goodrich was the fact that all but two of her team’s points came from those three players and she will no doubt be trying to instil some offence confidence to match their defensive skills, in her other players.

Under 13 Boys close their season with a win

Under 13 Boys Midlands Conference

Northants “Thunder” 58 - 39 Reading “Rockets”

The Northants under 13 boys finished their Conference campaign with a satisfying, if somewhat unconvincing home win against Reading Rockets. “Thunder” dominated the early exchanges and raced to a 9-2 lead. However, the “Rockets” found some form and stopped the Northants boys from moving further ahead. The quarter ended 17-10 but Thunder could have had a greater lead had they not missed 6 of the 7 free throws they were awarded.

The second quarter was a similar story with “Thunder” outscoring Reading in the early minutes then the two teams exchanged baskets through to the half time break which saw the Northants boys leading 35-23.

Coach Round was disappointed that the game was so close going into the second half. His fears were justified and a combination of “Thunder’s” failure to finish and Reading’s reluctance to cave in enabled the visitors to take the third quarter 18-12 and close the gap to just 6 points at 47-41.

“Thunder’s” relentless full court pressure and fast breaking offence gave them a 10-zero run at the start of the final period and four put-backs by Ed Wallhead sealed the victory but the 58-39 score-line disguised the fact that “Thunder” had missed too many scoring opportunities and allowed Reading too many offensive rebounds. Once again, Laurence Williams and Jared Ryan led the scorers list with 17 and 16 respectively.

Having not made the play-offs, the players now have an opportunity to develop their skills in readiness for next season.

England honours for three Northants players

‘Big G’ is off to Spain

There was good news for local player George Calvey this week. George who stands a massive 6feet 7 inches, a member of the Northants “Thunder” Cadet Men’s team was selected for the England Under 16 team to play against Spain in Madrid at the end of this month.

George a pupil at William Parker School in Daventry has only been playing basketball seriously for just over two years so this represents a tremendous achievement. He hopes a good performance in Spain will earn him a place in the England team to compete in the European Championship Qualification Tournament which will be staged in Bosnia, Herzegovina in August.

Rio and Steph will play in Ireland

Two more players from the Northants club have gained international honours. Rio Blessyn and Steph Ogden who are both pupils at Northampton School for Girls have been selected to play for the England 'New Horizons' team which will compete in a tournament in Ireland in July.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Amazing turnabout win for Moulton

British Colleges Men's Midlands Men's Elite League

Moulton College 87 – 81 Birmingham Metropolitan College

Just before Christmas the Moulton College men's team played Birmingham "Met" and ended up on the wrong end of a 107-49 score line. Against the same college last Wednesday Moulton's main aim was to try and keep the score respectable. Coach John Collins' pre-game talk focussed on players playing to their full potential and doing the simple things well.

Moulton were able to field a stronger team than in the previous game and employed a mobile zone defence they had practiced only briefly. The "Mets" team looked shell-shocked when they fell behind 7-2 but after a fearsome dressing down by their coach they did raise the level of their play. Even so they were still having problems with Moulton's rotating defence and at the end of the first period of play it was the home side that held the lead at 20-13.

Moulton had been playing with a great deal of composure but at the start of the second period "Mets" employed a double-teaming run-and-jump defence. Moulton's discipline disappeared and they were guilty of over-dribbling allowing the west midlanders to steal the ball on a number of occasions leading to easy scores. "Mets" went on an 11-zero run to take a 24-22 lead and at this stage it looked as if Moulton were done for. Coach Collins called a time out a re-enforced the team's press break tactics and his charges responded superbly. They went on an 18-9 charge of their own to lead 38-37 at half time with skipper Matt Yates and Linas Bajournas being particularly effective on offence.

"Mets" made the better start to the third quarter scoring two quick baskets to re-take the lead at 41-38 but there was a determination about the Moulton players who mounted an 18-4 surge to open up a double digit lead and suddenly there seemed to be a belief that they might clinch a win. The two teams exchanged baskets for the rest of the period so going into the final ten minutes of play Moulton were leading 68-58.

Moulton were having problems covering the mid post area and this was an area "Mets" chose to attack at the start of the final quarter. Their tactic proved to be successful with the Birmingham college scoring seven quick points without reply. Once again Moulton refused to buckle and Tom Halfhide, Kyle Mayes and Derice McLeod did a great job hustling at the top of the Moulton zone defence. Their efforts led to a number of steals and easy scores. By this time "Mets" were employing a Box and One defence paying particular attention to Yates but this created more space for Bajournas who scored at ease on a number of occasions.

With three minutes of the game left the score board showed Moulton leading 81-69 and the players could hardly believe their eyes. All that was needed now was good shot clock management but Moulton were guilty of rushing shots when possession was more important. "Mets" ended with a rush of points but there was no way back as Moulton held on for the 87-81 win.

In the amazing turn around win Yates was superb scoring 37 points including 13 of 15 from the free throw line and Bajournas supported well with 28 points while a useful contribution came from Byron Wing with 12 points.

THIS WEEK'S ACTION

Tuesday 12th March

6.45pm

Lightning versus Lightning Too

Saturday 16th March

11-30am

Junior Women versus Bristol "Storm"

Cadet Men versus City of Birmingham

1-30pm

Cadette Women versus Reading "Rockets"

Under 14 Boys versus Shropshire "Warriors"

3-30pm

Junior Men versus City of Birmingham

5-30pm

Senior Men versus Sporting Club Albion

These seven 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:

Under 13 Girls travel to Bury St Edmunds

Sunday 17th March

Junior Women travel to Reading "Rockets"

Under 14 Girls travel to Ipswich "Bobcats"