

NORTHANTS BASKETBALL CLUB

PRESS RELEASE

Nine three pointer can't save "Thunder" from defeat

Senior Men's Division Three (South Conference)

Northants "Thunder" 71 – 78 Thames Valley "Cavaliers"

The Northants senior men slipped to a seven point loss against Thames Valley Cavaliers last Saturday despite launching a barrage of nine successful three pointer shots. Thunder got off to a flying start, pushing out into a 15-6 lead, on the back of three long range jump shots from forward Dan Turiccki. Thames Valley were very uncomfortable playing high tempo basketball, and struggled to keep up with the speed of the Thunder guards and although the visiting team pulled the deficit back slightly, Northants held a 15-11 lead after the first period of play.

This lead was maintained lead going into the final five minutes of the second quarter at which time the proverbial 'wheels fell off', for the home side. With some poor shot selection, combined with a lack of rotation to the back court, Cavaliers finished the period with a 22-6 run to lead 42-31 at half time and leaving Thunder a mountain to climb to get back in the game.

Thunder made a determined effort to close the gap in the third quarter thanks to 11 points from Benji Henry but every time they scored back-to-back baskets, the Cavaliers would put a halt to any momentum by going back to their trusty forward line, of MacCauley and Perre. Northants amassed a positive 23 points between them, but found it tough to stop the experienced inside play of Thames Valley who scored 22 themselves.

With two minutes of the game remaining, Thunder had given a tremendous effort to get the deficit back to just four points, at 68-72, however once again Thames Valley hit baskets late in their shot clock, and whilst Thunder tried to respond, they turned the ball over three times in the last 2 minutes, to gift the visitors a 78-71 victory.

Once again, Thunder could not be faulted for the effort levels, against a physically dominant Thames Valley team for whom MacCauley and Perre scored a total of 46 points between them; however, they will look back on another missed opportunity to knock off one of the 'play off teams', and show their true potential.

In the disappointing defeat Henry top scored with 17 points with excellent support coming from Curtis Hadley and Turiccki with 15 and 14 points respectively while Adam Thomas chipped in with 11 points.

It's a big double for Junior Women

Junior Women's Midlands South West Conference

Wiltshire "Demons" 29 – 65 Northants "Lightning"

Wiltshire "Demons" 38 – 87 Northants "Lightning"

When teams withdrew from the Junior Women's Midlands South-West Conference leaving the remaining teams with a restricted fixture list, basketball's governing body came up with the idea of the teams playing each other three times. They also dismissed the idea of forming some kind of Premier Conference to avoid one-sided games.

Faced with two trips to Wiltshire to play Demons the Northants junior women proposed two games on the same day and this was accepted by the home club. The pressure of playing back-to-back games was made worse when two Lightning players, Caitlin Stewart and Ruchae Walton weren't allowed to play because their licences were still with the Northants cadette women's team.

Despite playing with just seven players Lightning dominated both games winning all eight periods of play. Superb defensive rebounding from Catrina Askham, Tina Gordon and Nia Owens restricted Demons to one shot offences in both games. This left Rio Blessyn (17 and 20), Abbi Hobbs (10 and 12), Stephanie Ogden (18 and 28), and Harri Owens (12 and 17) to take care of the scoring.

It was a tired septet that made their way back to Northamptonshire but the group could be proud of their achievements and with a won six, lost one record they remain the most successful team in the Conference.

Below par Cadet Boys see off “Bears”

Under 16 Boys Midland Conference

Bromsgrove “Bears” 36 – 73 Northants “Thunder”

Unfortunately, this game had everything that is bad about English age-group basketball. The game started late because some vital timing equipment was missing, the game was played on a slippery surface, and started with just one referee. When the second referee did arrive he spent more time practicing his own shooting than officiating the game and when it became obvious who was going to win both referees seem to lose interest in stopping the game for either violations or illegal contact.

Playing without the services of the influential Jacob Round who was on duty with the Northants under 15 team, Thunder made a lethargic start to the game and actually trailed midway through the first period of play. They recovered slightly to ease ahead 17-14 by the end of the period but were guilty of missing a disturbing number of lay ups.

Coach John Collins had asked his team to play full court man-to-man defence as a change from their normal zone press and this was proving difficult on the slippery surface. He made some adjustments before the start of the second quarter and these proved to be very successful with Bears limited to just nine points in the next ten minutes. For their part Thunder were still missing easy shots but took the period 18-9 to lead 35-23 at half time.

For the second half Thunder reverted to their pressing zone defences and over the final two quarters Bears could manage just 15 points several of those from illegal moves. Thunder were still not at their fluent best but with David Nieva controlling matters in the back court and Ayo Oluyede with Julian Abeam working well close to basket, they cruised to a comfortable 37 points win.

For Thunder, Oluyede top scored with 15 points, Nieva contributing 14 points while Hayden Sayers and Abeam scored 13 and 12 points respectively

Cadette Girls lose the battle but win the war

Under 16 Girls Midlands South West Conference

Nottingham “Wildcats” 58 – 49 Northants “Lightning”

When Lightning fell 20 points behind early in the fourth period of play it looked as if their hopes of winning the Midlands South West Conference title were rapidly ‘going down the drain’. That they battled back to lose by just nine points was almost entirely down to rookie guard Holly Winterburn who scored 11 personal points over the closing minutes of the game.

Wildcats win was greeted by wild enthusiasm from the parents and friends of their players but they were obviously forgetting that earlier in the season Lightning has beaten Wildcats by a massive 16 points. If the two teams have the same win, loss record at the end of the season points difference in the games between the two teams will be the deciding factor and Lightning have a seven points advantage.

In the latest game between the West Midlands rivals Wildcats were much the better team winning the first three periods of play with four of their players finishing with double figure points totals. As far as Lightning were concerned they depended too heavily for their points on Winterburn who finished with 19 points and Ruchae Walton who scored 20 points. No other Lightning player could make any substantial contribution although Caitlin Stewart pulled down 10 rebounds to go with her six points.

Under 15 Boys struggle but overcome “Rockets” to win the Conference title

Under 15 Boys Midlands & East Conference

Reading “Rockets” 82 – 96 Northants “Thunder”

With the regular season drawing to a close, this game between first and third in the Midlands Conference was always likely to be fiercely contested and so it proved. Thunder were playing to finish top of the table while Rockets were trying to secure a play-off spot.

After losing the tip-off Thunder were blitzed by Rockets, who jumped out to a 9-3 lead after three minutes play. The Northants boys looked shell shocked and were guilty of gifting the ball to their opponents, and found difficulty in combating the Rocket’s penetration offence. Despite this Thunder were able to edge the

first quarter 23-22 thanks to 11 points from Jacob Round who was the only Thunder player who seemed to be in control.

The second quarter saw Thunder missing a number of easy scoring opportunities and they were still guilty of turning the ball over too easily. To the delight of their supporters Rockets won the period 23-16 to take a 45-39 half time lead and a major shock was well and truly on the books.

Thunder coach Grahame Yates was beginning to wonder what had happened to his team as they appeared to be falling apart. Their defence was almost non-existent and they were handing the ball over to Rockets at an alarming rate. He stressed the importance of taking care of the ball and his players responded well clawing their way back into the game. With the defence looking better, Thunder were able to take control of the game while easy scores were achieved thanks to some good ball movement. Zak Kitchen scored a useful six points and with Round contributing 11 points, Thunder were able to win the quarter 25-16 to ease ahead by 64 points to 61.

With the Reading boys still sensing a chance of victory Thunder opened the fourth quarter with some pressure defence. This forced a number of turn overs resulting in easy scores for Thunder as they took the period 32-21 and the game 96-82. Round scored 20 points in that final quarter to take his game total to 54 while Ed Taylan contributed a useful 10 points.

That win secures the Conference title for the team but they would dearly like to go through the regular season undefeated. On Saturday they travel to second placed Thames Valley "Cavaliers" for their final game knowing the "Cavs" will be anxious to overturn the 42 point defeat they suffered at the Basketball Centre earlier in the season.

Under 14 Boys too strong for Nova

Under 14 Boys Midlands Conference

Notts Nova	46 – 77	Northants "Thunder"
-------------------	----------------	----------------------------

Thunder expected a tough game when they made the journey up the M1 to play Notts Nova and in the first phase of the game it looked like it was going to be a close run affair. The Northants boys started the game well and were 7 points up after six minutes, but a 9-2 run in Nova's favour gave a clear indication that Thunder were going to have to work hard for the win. Although Thunder led after the first quarter, it was by just 2 points; however, early in the second quarter, Nova's hopes of retaining the initiative were severely dented when one of their influential guards was forced to leave the game due to injury. Thunder seized their opportunity with Ed Wallhead, Josh Lloyd and Chris Amankonah all contributing to a 12-1 run which opened up a gap between the two teams. Tom Berry joined the party and helped the Northants boys to a 38-24 half-time lead.

During the half-time talk, Coach Round made it clear that the game was far from over. Thunder's full court pressure defence had proved effective in the first half and the plan was to carry on making life difficult for the Nova guards. The home team however, refused to roll over and accept that defeat was on the way and as Thunder missed shots and turned the ball over at one end of the court, Nova hit shots and finished fast-breaks at the other. Nova's 13-4 run reduced Thunder's lead to just 5 points and Coach Round was forced to take a time out and after some stern words, the game was transformed. Tighter defence stopped Nova from scoring for the remainder of the quarter and 12 points from Wallhead, Lloyd, Amankonah and Berry re-opened the gap between the two teams.

Nova tried their best to penetrate Thunder's defence, but with little success in the final period. The up-court pressure resulted in numerous steals that were converted into successful scores as Thunder added 23 points to their total and limited Nova to just nine. Thunder's 77-46 win was well-deserved and Coach Round was pleased with the team's performance. Although the majority of the points came from Wallhead (30), Amankonah (20), Lloyd (15) and Berry (10), all of the team members made a positive contribution to the victory.

One more win will guarantee Thunder a place in the Play-Offs, but the team are still aiming to secure second place in the league by winning all of their remaining games, the first of which is against Team Birmingham at home on Saturday.

Under 13 Boys lose last game of the season

Under 13 Boys Midlands Conference

Northants "Thunder" 48 – 101 City of Birmingham

The Northants under 13 boys closed their season with a 53 point loss against second in the table City of Birmingham. Despite the heavy defeat Coach Darijus Maldutis's team showed signs of improvement with several players showing promise for the future.

The C.O.B. coach opened the game with his second five on the court and Thunder led the game for the first five minutes of the first quarter. Then not for the first time this season the Northants boys were undone by a team with a standing height advantage. C.O.B. won the first quarter 21-16 and then thanks to a 17-3 closing charge took the second to open up a 48-25 half time lead.

Thunder battled hard throughout the third and fourth periods of play but were undone by a 14-zero C.O.B. surge at the end of the game and the fact that they missed a massive 24 free throws didn't help.

In the heavy defeat Ben Nailer top scored with 15 points. Oliver Dominique scored 12 points and rebounded well while Connor White battled hard for his eight point tally.

THIS WEEKEND'S ACTIVITIES

Saturday 28th February

9.30am-11am

Ballers Academy Session

10am-11am

Junior Ballers Session

11.30am

Junior Women versus Wiltshire "Demons"

Under 14 Boys versus Team Birmingham

1.30pm

Cadet Boys versus Leicester "Warriros"

3.30pm

Senior Women versus Sefton "Starlight"

These games will take place at the Northants Centre for Basketball which is based at Northampton School for Girls in Spinney Hill Road

Spectators are welcome and admission is FREE

Under 15 Boys travel to Thames Valley "Cavaliers"

Under 14 Girls travel to Leicester "Riders"

Sunday 1st March

11.45 pm

Cadette Girls versus City of Birmingham

1.45pm

Cadet Boys versus Sporting Club West Bromwich

Junior Women versus Herts "Warriros"

For further information contact **John Collins on 07801 533 151**