

NORTHANTS BASKETBALL CLUB

PRESS RELEASE

It's unlucky fourteen for "Thunder"

VCARS Division Four Midlands Conference

Northants "Thunder"	(77 - 77)	Sporting Club Albion
	85 - 87	

A large crowd gathered at the Basketball Centre last Saturday in the hope of cheering "Thunder" on to the completion of a perfect Midlands Conference season. In the event they were treated to an exciting, high quality game but unfortunately for them the final result didn't go the way of their favourites.

S.C. Albion are pushing for second place in the Conference and arrived on Saturday in determined mood. This was very clear from the intensity and seriousness of their warm up and pre-game preparation and guided by former BBL player Clive Allen they turned in an excellent team performance. Playing an aggressive trapping man-to-man defence Albion took the first period of play 15-18 leaving "Thunder" in no doubt that they were in for a real contest.

Albion were relying on their defence to force "Thunder" mistakes and some excellent perimeter shooting on the other hand "Thunder" were looking to launch their renowned fast break while Leome Francis was becoming dominant in the close to basket exchanges. The two teams exchanged baskets during the second quarter which ended up tied at 17 each, Albion retaining their three point lead at 35-32 athalf time.

Of late "Thunder" have been involved in a number of 'no contests' with little or no pressure but this was a totally different matter and under pressure one or two of their players found it difficult to cope. Throughout the first half "Thunder" had struggled to contain Albion's smaller but quicker players so Coach Grahame Yates switched his team to a zone defence but they still had problems containing penetration through the middle of the zone. Albion took the third period 24-21 to extend their lead to 59-53 and it was clear that a massive "Thunder" effort would be required if they were going to retain their unbeaten record.

"Thunder" enjoyed their best ten minutes of the evening during the fourth quarter with Francis continuing to dominate close to basket well supported by Jacob Holt while the brothers Yates, Jonny and Matt were looking impressive in the back court. "Thunder" chipped away at the Albion lead and if they had been a little more clinical from the line (they missed three of six free throws late in proceedings) they might have taken the game. In the event they won the period 24-18 leaving the scores tied up at 77 all and the prospect of overtime.

Both teams looked nervous going into the extra five minutes of play but Albion hit two big perimeter shots to seize the initiative while "Thunder" were guilty of a couple of elementary mistakes. For their part "Thunder" looked to penetrating drives from Jonny Yates for their points but Albion were able to hold out for the 87-85 win leaving "Thunder" to contemplate a Conference title and a home Play Off game against Stockport "Spartans" who were runners up in the North Conference.

In Saturday's defeat Leome Francis led his team's scoring with 39 points with good support coming from Jonny Yates and Jacob Holt with 15 and 12 points respectively while Leon Francis returned from injury to score 12 points.

A weekend of mixed fortunes for Junior Women

Things are beginning to look very tight in the battle for a home tie in the Junior Women's Play Offs with three teams in contention for runners up spot in the Midlands South-West Conference. As far as "Lightning" were concerned it was a case of one step forward one step back with a win and a loss

Junior Women's Midlands South-West Conference

Northants "Lightning"	69 - 52	Bristol "Storm"
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"Lightning" got their busy weekend off to a positive start with a 17 points win over Bristol "Storm" despite missing the services of captain Izzy Johns and Karla Pinney. The two teams were all tied up at 12 all after a dour first quarter and by half time "Lightning" just held the initiative at 32-26 thaks to two successful three point shots from rookie Sarah Round.

For the third quarter Coach Stacey Shakespeare switched her team to a full court pressing defence and the pressure on the Bristol guards forced them to cough the ball up on a number of occasions leading to easy “Lightning” scores from Hannah Nolan and Steph Ogden. “Lightning” outscored their opponents 20-8 in that third period of play to take what looked to be a match winning lead at 52-34 and this proved to be the case despite “Storm” narrowly taking the last period of play 18-17.

In a sound all-round team performance Ogden top scored with 22 points and she received good support from Hannah Nolan and Lauren Brookes with 13 and 12 points respectively

Reading “Rockets” 66 - 37 Northants “Lightning”

Less than 24 hours after their classy win over Bristol “Storm” the Northants junior women travelled to Reading to take on “Rockets” one of the other teams in contention for that Conference second place spot. “Lightning” started well and at the end of the first quarter had eased ahead by 16 points to 10.

At the start of the second period of play Reading mounted an obdurate zone defence and “Lightning” were restricted to shots from outside the keyway. The Northants girls were just unable to get the ball to players close to the basket and defensively they looked tired after the efforts of the previous day. There were glimmers of hope but over the final three periods “Lightning” were outscored 22-56 as they slipped to a 29 point defeat.

In the heavy loss stand in captain Lois Bain recorded a double-double with 11 points and as many rebounds while Steph Ogden and Amy Boot contributed 10 and 9 points respectively

It’s a cruise for Junior Men

Junior Men’s Premier Division North

Northants “Thunder” 90 - 64 City of Birmingham

Regrettably there are times in the great game of basketball when the outcome of the game is already clear. One team knows they are going to win at a canter and the other has tried everything they know but just can’t close the gap. Last Saturday’s encounter between the Northants junior men and City of Birmingham was one of those games when a 10-1 “Thunder” run at the start of the third quarter took them into a 26 point lead with the C.O.B. players realizing there was no way back.

Trailing 40-71 going into the final ten minutes of play C.O.B. showed commendable resolution to dominate the opening minutes of the period before Coach Rob Eddon fielded his departing second year players to an enthusiastic reception from a sizeable crowd. The players didn’t let him down as skipper Matt Yates stroked home two three-pointers and Jack Thomas scored with a silky move to basket as “Thunder” completed a 26 point win.

For “Thunder” eleven of their twelve players contributed to the final total with three of them Linas Bafornas, under-aged Pauli Laurinolli and Matt Yates scoring in double figures; Yates leading the way with a 32 point haul.

Rare victory for Cadet Men

Cadet Men’s Premier Division North

Northants “Thunder” 89 - 76 City of Birmingham

The Northants cadet men recorded a rare win when they got the better of City of Birmingham in an entertaining game at the Basketball Centre last Saturday. Coach John Collins’ pre-game talk was all about playing with confidence, relaxing and giving maximum defensive effort at all times. “Thunder” looked much better balanced when they took to the court thanks to the inclusion of the under 15 point guard Carlo Nieva and they started the game like an express team rushing out to a 27-12 lead after the first quarter.

C.O.B. rallied impressively in the second period of play with “Thunder” lapsing into some of the bad habits they had displayed so frequently throughout the season. The Birmingham team took the period 27-16 so reducing “Thunder’s” lead to 43-39 at half time.

Both teams played some entertaining basketball in the second half with C.O.B. relying on a man-to-man defence while “Thunder” were relying on a variety of zones. The decisive moment might well have come by accident when Karan Virdee picked up his fourth foul while George Calvey was feeling unwell. Collins

switched his team to a man-to-man and immediately his team took the initiative narrowly winning the third and fourth quarters to record only their fifth Conference game of the season.

In the 13 point win Pauli Laurinolli top scored with 33 points. George Paul and Josh Round contributed 21 and 19 points respectively while Paul completed a double-double with 10 rebounds. These three players have dominated “Thunder’s” scoring all season but Collins was pleased with the contributions of Luke Joines, and Declan Burke and the rebounding power of Karan Virdee.

“Lightning” earn local bragging rights

Cadette Women’s Midland, South-West Conference

Northants “Lightning”

58 - 49

Northants “Lightning Too”

At a time when many clubs are struggling to raise a single team it was a delight to see twenty young ladies from the Northants Club turning out for this Midland South-West Conference game. It was also a joy to watch a highly competitive game of an extremely high quality.

“Lightning” were able to avenge the defeat they suffered at the hands of “Lightning Too” earlier in the season but “Too” weren’t happy with the foul count which was very heavily against them. Having said that it was “Too” who used more aggressive up-court defensive tactics while “Lightning” adopted more passive half court man-to-man and zone defences.

“Lightning” eased ahead in the first quarter which they took 15-12 with Ruchae Walton causing problems for “Too’s” defence. “Too” battle back to take the second period of play 17-13 thanks to the efforts of Steph Ogden and they went into the half time break leading 29-28.

Both teams were looking for a strong start to the third quarter and it was “Lightning Too” who ‘hit the ground running’ with a 6-zero surge to extend their lead to 35-28. The two teams exchanged baskets before “Lightning” struck with a 9-2 surge culminated by a three-pointer from Charlotte Berridge at the end of the quarter.

Leading 44-41 going into the last ten minutes of play “Lightning” made a strong start to the period outscoring their opponents 8-zero to give them a 17-2 run on either side of the break. By this time “Too” had rather lost their focus and had become too obsessed with some of the refereeing decisions. Trailing 41-52 they finished the stronger of the two teams but a massive three-pointer from “Lightning’s” Sarah Round was the icing on the cake as her team held on for a 58-49 win.

For “Lightning” five players made significant contributions while “Lightning Too’s” scoring was dominated by the excellent Steph Ogden who scored 25 points with good support coming from Lauren Brookes and Tara Hinds. Sarah Round led the “Lightning” scoring with 18 points and looked a class act in the back court while Charlotte Berridge contributed 12 points. Caitlin Stewart and Lauren Milne both scored 9 points with the latter hauling down a massive 18 rebounds.

“Lightning Too” too strong for “Rockets”

Northants “Lightning Too”

119 – 13

Reading “Rockets”

“Lightning Too” didn’t have to wait too long to get back to winning ways when they totally overwhelmed a young and inexperienced Reading “Rockets” team last Saturday. “Rockets” failed to score in double figures in all four periods of play with “Lightning Too” just looking for different ways to score.

To their credit the Reading girls never gave up but one is left to seriously question how the sport’s governing body can possibly come up with a competition format that pits teams like “Rockets” against teams packed with national and regional team players. In games like this one neither the losers nor the victors gain anything.

In the overwhelming win all eight “Lightning Too” players scored led by Steph Ogden and Lauren Brookes with 31 and 29 points respectively while Rio Blessyn, Amy Boot and Hannah Nolan all scored in double figures.

No joy for Under 14 Boys

Under 14 Boys Midlands Conference

Northants "Thunder"

60 - 86

Shropshire "Warriors"

The Northants under 14 boys closed their 2012-2013 Midlands Conference campaign with a 26 point defeat against bottom of the table Shropshire "Warriors". Coach Mickey Paul gave all twelve of his player's ample court time and at times his team played some attractive basketball lead by the guard play of David Nieva.

"Thunder" were very competitive in the first quarter which a tall "Warriors" just edged 22-19. The second period of play was a disaster for "Thunder" as they repeatedly turned the ball over giving the Shropshire lads easy scoring opportunities which they gladly accepted winning the quarter 21-8 to go into half time leading 43-27.

The home side looked far more focussed in the third period which was tied 20 all with Ayomide Oluyede and Reece Zubal both making useful contributions. At 47-63 there was just a faint hope of a "Thunder" revival but they were guilty of reverting back to the bad habits of the second period as "Warriors" recorded just their third win of the season winning by 86 points to 60.

Not for the first time this season, "Thunder's" scoring was dominated by Nieva who totalled 36 points, Oluyede and Zubal contributing 10 and eight points respectively.

Ruchae and Caitlin see Under 14 Girls home

Under 14 Girls Midland South West Conference

Ipswich "Bobcats"

59 - 51

Northants "Lightning"

Stand out performances from Caitlin Stewart and Ruchae Walton and invaluable contributions from some unsung heroines helped the Northants under 14 girls record a gutsy win over a very tall Ipswich "Bobcats" team. The coaches of the two teams had agreed to play the game without the services of their leading point guards who were attending an England camp and at the start of the game "Lightning" didn't seem to be missing Sarah Round as they jumped out to a 16-2 lead.

All this changed as "Bobcats" regrouped and were able to launch a number of fast break attacks with the Northants girls unable to cover their back court. Ipswich mounted a 7-2 run to reduce the gap to 18-9 at the end of the first quarter and it was more of the same in the second quarter. "Bobcats" outscored "Lightning" 16-10 and at half time "Lightning" were holding a tenuous 28-25 lead.

Coach Karen Goodrich's half time talk was very much about covering the back court and in the third period of play Esther Alake, Bahira Barakat, Isla Cairns and Becky Easton did just that. This allowed Stewart and Walton to carry the "Lightning" offence and although their shooting left a lot to be desired they helped "Lightning" to take the quarter 16-8 to go into the final period leading 44-33. The lead would have been substantially larger had they not missed all ten the free throws they were awarded.

The final quarter was a nervous one for "Lightning" as "Bobcats" began to effectively use their big players Cooney and Musson. This pair combined for 14 points to reduce the "Lightning" lead to 48-47 before Cooney picked up her fifth foul. This opened up scoring opportunities for Walton as "Lightning" closed the game with an 11-4 rush culminating with a Stewart three-pointer as "Lightning" took an exciting contest 59-51 and so give themselves a very good chance of a home game in the 1st Round of the Play Offs.

In the battling eight point win Ruchae Walton kept her 'DD' nickname alive with 23 points and 13 rebounds. Caitlin Stewart scored 22 points and led the team well while Abi Hobbs and Cat Askham both made important rebounding contributions but Goodrich was quick to highlight that back court cover that stopped the "Bobcats" fast breaks.

Overtime win for Under 13 Girls on a day of new experiences

Under 13 Girls East of England League

**Bury “Bulldogs” (39 - 39) Northants “Lightning”
44 - 51**

The Northants under 13 girls went through a range of experiences before and during their East of England game against Bury “Bulldogs”.

Their experiences opened with an hour waiting in the car park of County Upper School because they had been sent the wrong tip off time. Their wait wasn't over because having got onto the court they had to hang on for a referee to arrive. Not surprisingly the girls made a hesitant start to the game and after the first ten minutes of play they found themselves trailing by 14 points to 2.

This led to another experience namely a comeback. Urged on by Coach Darius Maldutis the “Lightning” players suddenly started to play some spirited defence and confident offence. They got the score back to 20-21 before “Bulldogs” scored two breakaway baskets to lead 25-20 at half time.

In the third quarter thanks to some excellent defence from Odeta Bajorunaite and Precious Ogaji the Bury team were restricted to just four points as “Lightning” took a 32-29 lead into the final stanza. In that final period of play it was “Lightning's” turn to find scoring difficult as they launched no fewer than 26 shots but could only score seven points. Going into the final minute “Lightning” still led 39-37 but Bury scored with a fast break to take the game into overtime, another new experience for the “Lightning” players.

“Bulldogs” opened the scoring in overtime with a free throw but “Lightning” dominated proceedings and finally ran out winners by 51 points to 44 with their scoring led by Ellie Solomon with 17 points and Bahira Amr Barakat with 16 while Precious Ogaji recorded a double-double, another first for the team.

The team travelled back to Northampton in good spirits thinking about a day of new experiences but most all about an outstanding team performance

THIS WEEK'S ACTION

Saturday 23rd March

11-30 am Under 14 Girls versus London “Youngbloods”
1-30pm Cadet Men versus Cheshire “Panthers”
Under 15 Girls versus Bromsgrove “Bears”
3-30pm Senior Men versus Stockport “Spartan” (Play Offs 1st Round)

**These 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:

Cadette Women travel to Wiltshire “Demons”

Sunday 24th March

Under 13 Girls travel to Brentwood “Fire”