

NORTHANTS BASKETBALL CLUB

PRESS RELEASE

Nightmare final period spell doom for “Lightning”

Senior Women’s National League Division 2

(North Conference)

Northants “Lightning” 47 – 58 Sefton “Starlight”

For most of the season the biggest problem for the Northants women’s team has been scoring points and this weakness came back to haunt them once again against Sefton Starlight last Saturday.

After a cracking start to the game which saw Lightning pull out to a 19-8 lead they could only manage another 28 points in the next three periods of play. For their part Starlight sat in an active but obdurate zone defence allowing Lightning precious few scoring opportunities close to basket. This meant that the home side had to rely on fast breaks and perimeter shooting for their scores, but the Sefton team was able to protect their basket efficiently in broken play and Lightning’s perimeter shooting was well below par. It was also disappointing that the Northants girls were unable to generate many turn overs from their pressure defence.

After their good start Lightning watched as the visitors gradually closed the gap thanks to some excellent shooting from Cass so that going into the final period of play Lightning held just a narrow lead at 37-36. By this time the home team had switched to a man to man defence but Cass poured in 11 points during the final quarter as her team outscored Lightning 22-10 to take a well deserved win.

In the disappointing defeat only Stephanie Ogden with 18 points scored in double figures but Ruchae Walton and Caitlin Stewart battled hard for their 9 and 8 point totals.

Junior Women stay on track for a Play Off place

Junior Women’s Midlands South West Conference

It was another busy weekend for the Northants junior women with back to back games on Saturday and Sunday but they picked up two wins which keeps them in contention for the Conference title.

Northants “Lightning” 93 – 30 Wiltshire “Demons”

First up for Lightning were Wiltshire Demons a team they had played on two occasions the previous weekend. The two teams know each other so well they are almost on present buying terms but Lightning showed little charity to their ‘friends’ as they totally dominated all four periods of play. To their credit the West Country team having been restricted to single figure scoring in the first three periods of play did manage ten points in the final quarter. Meanwhile, Lightning were almost scoring at will but Coach Stacey Shakespeare was aware that several of her players had a busy weekend so limited their playing time.

In the 63 point win all nine Lightning players scored led by Ruchae Walton with 37 points while Tara Hings with 16 points and Stephanie Ogden with 14 points supported well.

Northants “Lightning” 75 – 61 Herts “Warriors”

Less than 24 hours after their game against Wiltshire, Lightning were back on court against Herts Warriors with every likelihood that this would be a much tougher contest, and so it proved.

Faced by the Warriors zone defence, Lightning looked impressive on the break while Lauren Brookes hit a couple of big three-pointers when all five of the Warriors players got back on defence. The problem for Lightning was their opponents were scoring with ease against their full court zone press so after the first quarter the scores were level at 16 all.

Lightning edged ahead in the second quarter to lead 35-32 at half time but there was every indication that this was going to be a close run thing. Two 6-zero runs in the third period helped Lightning to ease ahead by a further point to lead 58-54 going into the final stanza.

At this stage stand in coach Karen Goodrich made three vital and successful decisions. First, she switched her team to man to man defence, she also went with a small mobile 'five' and introduced the energy of under 14 team member Holly Winterburn to the game. The effect was immediate; with the Herts team restricted to just seven points in the period as Lightning scored 17 to cruise to a hard won 75-61 victory.

In the 14 point win which keeps Lightning on top of the Conference table their scoring was led by Ogden with 21 points. Brookes scored 16 and the industrious Ruchae Walton 14 while Tara Hings recored an impressive double-double with 10 points and 14 rebounds.

Productive weekend for Cadet Men

Under 16 Boys Midland Conference

Northants "Thunder" 71 – 59 Leicester "Warriors"

The Northants under 16 boys took a major step to securing second place in the Midland Conference with two wins over the course of last weekend.

On Saturday playing without three influential players they came out on top against third placed Leicester Warriors. Led by the dynamic David Nieva, Thunder enjoyed a very successful first half and led 38-23 at half time. They had caused Warriors a great deal of problems with their 3-2 zone defence and full court press but Warriors coach made some excellent adjustments at half time.

Warriors combated the Thunder zone with a 1-4 offence causing match up problems for the Northants boys. Warriors took the third period of play 21-14 to get the scores back to 52-44 and they were well and truly back in the game going into the last ten minutes of play.

Thunder coach John Collins switched his team to a man to man defence for the final quarter with Nieva taking Warriors powerful guard Manuemba who repeatedly tried to 'post up' the diminutive Northants player. With clever positional play Nieva nullified this threat while Justin Triory did a great job on Warriors left handed centre Abbott. Thanks to their more secure defence Thunder were able to take the final quarter 19-15 and win the game by 71 points to 59.

In the 12 point win Nieva top scored with 20 points while Hayden Sayers had four three-pointers in his 19 point haul.

Northants "Thunder" 90 – 52 Sporting Club Albion

Less than 24 hours after their tough game against Leicester Warriors, Thunder were back on court to take on a young but athletic Sporting Club Albion. Thunder were boosted by the return of three players including Jacob Round who had been on duty with the under 15 team the previous day.

Albion were obviously 'up' for the fray and against a Thunder team who not surprisingly looked a little jaded after their efforts of the previous day. Albion were leading 10-9 when Round was introduced into the game and his impact was immediate. Thunder poured in 20 points in four minutes 16 of them coming from Round as Thunder closed the first quarter leading 29-12.

Like a number of teams Albion had been troubled by Thunder's zone press in the first period but their coaching staff made adjustments in the second quarter and were able to advance the ball more successfully. With Thunder's play losing some of its initial intensity Albion were able to tie the quarter 16 all but Thunder still held a substantial 43-28 lead at half time.

For the third quarter Collins switched his team to a half court man to man defence and looked to run a number of different player combinations into the game. With Round in devastating form the home team won the period 28-18 to extend their lead to 73-46 and to all intents and purposes it was 'game over'.

Thunder's defence in the final quarter was positively claustrophobic as Albion were restricted to just six points while Thunder extended their total by 17 up to 90.

In the 38 point win Round was almost unstoppable scoring 50 personal points while David Nieva was the best of the exhausted rest with 13 points but Collins was pleased that all nine of his players contributed to the scoring despite a poor exhibition of perimeter shooting.

Cadette Women get back to winning ways

Under 16 Girls Midlands South West Conference

Northants "Lightning" 78 -45 City of Birmingham

After their disappointing loss against Nottingham Wildcats the previous week the Northants under 16 girls were anxious to get back to winning ways when they faced City of Birmingham at the Basketball Centre. Several of the Northants girls had played in two games the previous day and faced another game later that afternoon so Coach Karen Goodrich was keen to play them as a little as possible in this game.

From the outset it was obvious that C.O.B. had improved a great deal over the course of the season as they took a 13-6 lead. This jolted Lightning into action and a 12-2 surge gave them an 18-15 advantage after the first period of play.

Lightning knew that they couldn't take their opponents lightly as the two teams exchanged scores at the start of the second quarter before Lightning went on a 10-zero charge inspired by Ruchae Walton to take a 42-29 half time lead. Looking to turn the screw in the third quarter Lightning were able to produce an impressive defensive display inspired by the efforts of Caitlin Stewart as the Birmingham team were restricted to a miserly six points. Lightning scored 14 themselves to extend their lead to 56-35 and 'put the game to bed'.

C.O.B. continued to battle hard in the fourth quarter but even though Goodrich rotated her players freely they were outscored 22-10 as Lightning strolled to a 78-45 win led by Walton's double-double of 22 points and 10 rebounds. The other nine Lightning players all scored with nice points contributions coming from Cat Askham, Esther Alake and Holly Winterburn.

Under 15 Boys complete a perfect Conference season

Under 15 Boys Midlands & East Conference

Thames Valley "Cavaliers" 90 – 93 Northants "Thunder"

When Cavaliers played Thunder earlier in the season it was a very feisty affair. As he left the court after his team had suffered a 40 plus points defeat the Cavaliers coach promised to make it extremely difficult for Thunder in the return fixture. From the time Thunder arrived at the game venue, it was plain to see, that it was going to be so. Warm up time was limited as was court space, the table officials seemed to be the third referee, ensuring Thunder was abiding to every rule, while Cavaliers had free rein.

Thunder won the tip off at the start of the game but that was the end of anything positive for some time. The Northants boys looked nervous and for good reason; the environment was very hostile and a number of the referee's decisions seemed to favour the home team. Coach Yates had warned the boys beforehand this was likely to be the case, so needed to remain calm, however when leading scorer Jacob Round got injured, even the coach got irate and receiving a technical foul for his troubles. At this point, the mountain looked too high to climb as Cavaliers finished the quarter with a seven point lead at 23-16.

Needing to dig deep the Northants boys seem to decide that Cavaliers would not triumph without a fight and took them to the battle to their opponents in the second quarter. Laurence Williams was playing like a man possessed scoring seven points he was also putting in some good passes to get his team mates on the scoreboard. Even so Thunder lost the quarter 23-24 and found themselves trailing 39-47 at half time.

Williams continued to take the battle to Cavaliers and this appeared to spur his teammates on. Ainsley Reynolds was putting pressure on his opponent and was able to force a number of turn overs leading to easy scores for Thunder. This helped to even the score at 17 all for the quarter and set up what was to be a monumental battle in the 4th.

When the fourth quarter started a number of Thunder players found themselves in foul trouble. Williams picked up his fourth when he appeared to be fully three feet from the alleged incident while Round who had returned picked up four fouls in under seven minutes. When both players fouled out of the game once again the outlook looked bleak, however Zinzan Oostenhuijen was having a sterling quarter producing an excellent defensive performance and dishing out a number of assists. Jared Ryan also made a significant contribution to Thunder's efforts scoring eight points. In a high scoring quarter Thunder outscored their opponents by an impressive 37 points to 27 to take the game by 93 points to 90 to secure an unbeaten 14 and zero Conference record and a home tie in the first two rounds of the Play Offs.

In difficult circumstances Thunder couldn't have had better preparation for the Play Offs. With Round injured and then fouled out of the game four other players Ed Taylan, Zak Kitchen Tyler Mutemasango and Williams, scored in double figures while a number of other players certainly stood up and held themselves accountable.

Under 14 Boys stay on track with another big win

Under 14 Boys Midlands Conference

Northants "Thunder" 108 - 48 Team Birmingham

Thunder had beaten Team Birmingham by just five points earlier in the season so in his pre-game talk, Coach Round encouraged his players to view the return fixture as a 'must-win' game and this was certainly the case in terms of play-off placings.

In front of an expectant home crowd, Thunder started very well indeed and raced to a 12-5 lead. Full court pressure from Tom Berry and Josh Lloyd caused the Birmingham guards all sorts of problems and Chris Amankonah's personal defence containing Team Birmingham's star player was impressive. At the other end of the floor, Thunder's fast-breaking offence was relentless. It was an Ed Wallhead rebound that normally initiated the offence followed by an up-court pass from Josh Lloyd and a finish from Noah Wilborn. By the end of the first quarter Thunder's defence had held Birmingham to 11 points whilst their free-flowing offence had taken their total to 28.

It was a similar story in the second period during which Thunder went on a 24-4 run. Birmingham had no way of slowing Thunder's offensive juggernaut and when Max Evans and Gio Prati joined the list of scorers, no-one would have blamed the Birmingham Coach for throwing in the towel. By half-time, the score stood at 56-21 in Thunder's favour and the Northants boys were feeling good. However, at the training session prior to the game, Coach Round had mentioned that he feared that the team could slip into complacency, which is exactly what happened in the third quarter. Having completely dominating the game, they allowed Birmingham to go on a 10-2 run. However, this didn't make too much of a dent into Thunder's lead and they soon regained control.

Going into the final period, Northants had a very comfortable 40 point lead. Although they had dropped back to half-court defence, Birmingham struggled to find a route to the basket and Thunder looked like they could run down the court at speed all day. When the final buzzer went, Thunder's lead had been extended by another 20 points and Coach Round was extremely satisfied with the 108-48 score-line. Although their cause had been helped by the fact that one of Birmingham's main scoring threats was unable to start the game through injury, it was clear that Thunder had made great progress since the last meeting of these two teams.

Once again, Ed Wallhead led all scorers with 38 points and three other Thunder players reached double figures, those being Lloyd (23), Amankonah (18) and birthday boy Noah Wilborn (12). However, it was the overall team performance that had impressed the spectators the most. The win may have guaranteed Thunder a play-off place, but Coach Round will be looking for the team to tighten up its defence in the last two league games of the season.

Under 14 Girls still unbeaten

Under 14 Girls Midlands Conference

Leicester "Riders" 39 - 96 Northants "Lightning"

The Northants under 14 girls travelled to Leicester to take on Riders looking to preserve their 100% record. Without two of their leading scorers who were on duty with the Cadette women, Lightning made a slow start and found themselves trailing 6-10 after four minutes of play. Coach Stacey Shakespeare took a time out and reminded her team that things covered in practice and hard work were the keys to winning the game. Her words were taken on board by her players and by the end of the first quarter they had edged ahead 24-16.

The second and third periods of play were particularly productive for the Northants girls. They won the second 30-9 and the third 24-4 to take a 78-29 lead going into the last ten minutes of play. In the last quarter the team relaxed their efforts somewhat winning it 18-10 to run out comfortable winners by 96 points to 39.

The Lightning team included three under 12 players but all 12 of the team scored with Tia Allen, Bahira Barakat, Akiliah Chambers, Hannah Davy and Odera Onwumechili all recording double figure totals.

THIS WEEKEND'S ACTIVITIES

Saturday 7th March

9.30am until 11.00am

"Ballers" Academy

10.00amd until 11.00am

Junior Ballers

There are **no** home games at the Basketball Centre this weekend

Cadette Women travel to Bristol "Storm"

Under 14 Girls travel to Leicester "Warriors"

Sunday 8th March

Senior Women travel to Sheffield "Hatters II"

Cadet Boys travel to Shropshire "Warriors"

Under 14 Boys travel to City of Birmingham

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