

NORTHANTS BASKETBALL CLUB

MEDIA RELEASE

Senior men get back to winning ways

Men's National League Division 3

(North Conference)

Northants "Thunder" 95 – 78 Derby "Trailblazers II"

After their shock defeat at the hands of Leeds Carnegie the previous weekend, the Northants senior men got back to winning ways last Saturday with a comfortable 17 point revenge win over the Derby "Trailblazers" second string. The "Thunder" players and coaching staff were hoping that Leeds would do them a favour and defeat table-topping Rossendale but in the event "Raptors" cruised to a 34 points win and look favourites to take the North Conference title.

The game against "Trailblazers" was one of runs and counter runs punctuated by two monster dunks from Thunder's Leome Francis and some excellent long-range shooting from both teams. "Thunder" started the better of the two teams pushing out to a 25-14 first quarter lead. A one sided game looked to be on the cards when "Thunder" mounted a 13-3 run but "Trailblazers" responded well and only lost the quarter 24-28 with "Thunder" holding a 53-38 half time lead.

It was a positive "Thunder" that came out for the second half and a 10-4 charge saw them open up a 21 point lead. The Derby team responded with a 13-4 run of their own on the back of three, three-pointers from Henderson but "Thunder" were able to extend their lead to 76-57 by the end of the quarter.

"Thunder's" performance had been very much of a 'curate's egg'. When they pressurised the ball and ran the ball back they were unstoppable but when they relaxed their efforts their defensive transition was poor and Derby were able to mount comebacks. This pattern continued in the final stanza with a lethargic "Thunder" being outscored 8-1 before changing gear and putting the game out of the reach of Derby with an 18-6 charge. It was pity they couldn't maintain this effort to the end as the game ended with "Trailblazers" closing with a 7-zero run of their own.

In the 95-78 win Jason Tucker lead "Thunder's" scoring with 24 points which included six, three-pointers. Good support came from Leome Francis and Leon Henry who both scored 20 points while Jonny Yates made a number of key scores in his 15 point haul.

Unless Rossendale slip up at home against Leeds next weekend "Thunder" can only hope for runners-up spot in the North Conference which would see them come up against Plymouth Marjoh "Cannons" in the Play Off quarter finals, with the formidable London Lithuanica waiting in the wings.

Junior Men collapse in final quarter

Junior Men's Premier Division North

Northants "Thunder" 62 – 85 Birmingham "A's"

For the second week running the Northants junior men found themselves in contention going into the fourth period of play only to collapse and lose heavily. On Saturday against Birmingham "A's" a team that had beaten "Thunder" by 56 points earlier in the season, some tenacious defence saw the Northants boys well in contention at 60-65 with seven minutes of the game remaining. By this satge of the game Coach John Collins was worried that "A's" were beginning to get to grips with his team's match-up zone defence so he switched to a man to man defence. That decision proved to be one of the worst of his long coaching career as his weary "Thunder" outfit were totally 'blown away' by the athletic Birmingham players who closed out the game with a 20-2 charge to give the final score line a totally unrealistic look.

Until that final capitulation "Thunder" had battled hard to stay in contention with the National Cup winners coping well with "A's" full court defence. The crucial change in the game came with Collins' switch to that man to man defence plus Birmingham's stifling half court trapping defence.

In the 23 point loss Sam Round and Linas Bajorunas led the "Thunder" scoring with 20 and 15 points respectively while George Paul contributed 9 points and Josh Round eight.

Junior Women's Play Off chances take a major setback.

Junior Women's Midlands Conference

Northants "Lightning" 63 – 73 Herts "Warriors"

Any slight hope the Northants junior women had of making the end of season Play Offs disappeared with this loss against table-topping Herts "Warriors". Previous games between the two teams had resulted in 20 points plus wins for "Warriors" so on the face of it this ten point set back represented a major improvement but a win was what was needed but the game Northants girls just couldn't pull it off.

"Lightning" gave themselves a proverbial mountain to climb as the visitors opened the game with a 16-zero rush. "Lightning" countered with two three pointers from Sarah Round and some good work close to the basket from Lauren Milne. Their efforts got the score line back to 12-19 by the end of the first period of play and back-to-back scores from Rio Blessyn closed the gap further to 21-24. "Lightning" were unable to maintain their efforts and a 13-2 run by "Warriors" gave them a 37-23 half time lead.

If "Lightning" were to record a victory over the Conference leaders they need to make a good start to the third quarter but it was the Hertfordshire girls who gained the ascendancy as they outscored "Lightning" to extend their lead to 55-31. The game looked to be as good as over but a brace of three-pointers from Stephanie Ogden and four points from Round helped "Lightning" to mount an 11-2 charge to close the gap to 42-57 going into the last period.

"Lightning" took the final quarter 21-16 thanks to eight points apiece from the Lauren's, Brookes and Milne but it was too little too late as "Warriors" held on for the 73-63 win which saw an end to "Lightning's" Play Off hopes.

In the ten points defeat Milne and Brookes led the "Lightning" scoring with 15 and 12 points respectively; Round supported well with 12 points while Blessyn and Ogden both contributed eight points.

Cadette Women hit another 'ton'

Under 16 Girls Midlands South – West Conference

Team Solent "Suns" 107 - 30 Northants "Lightning"

The driving distance between Northampton and Southampton is around 110 miles. This scribe is tempted to wonder if 110 became the target for the Northants cadette women as they played out another one-sided game which was debatable value to the players of either side.

The game was as good as over as a contest after the first period of play with "Lightning" leading 32-8 and certainly was at half time with a 56-18 score line. The young "Suns" team kept battling to the end but just didn't have the fire power to trouble the Northants girls who cruised to a 77 points win which clinches the Midlands South-West Conference title.

For the most part it was a case of statistic collecting for "Lightning" with all ten of Coach Karen Goodrich's team contributing to the scoring which was led by Ruchae Walton with 35 points. She also pulled down 13 rebounds. Charlotte Berridge contributed 21 points and yet again Caitlin Stewart turned in an excellent all-round performance with 17 points, seven rebounds and seven assists. Goodrich was full of praise for the efforts of all her players identifying the efforts of Eden Brown (7 points and 8 rebounds), Abi Hobbs (10 points), and Hari Owens (6 points and 11 rebounds) for special mention.

Cadet Men win Black Country battle

Cadet Men's Midlands Conference

Sporting Club Albion 71 – 79 Northants "Thunder"

The Northants "Thunder" Cadet Men travelled to Sporting Club West Bromwich Albion a team they beat by 22 points in their previous encounter, looking for the win that would move them closer to the Conference title. In the event they got involved in a real physical battle with "Thunder" finally triumphing by eight points in a very scrappy game.

The home side showed dominance at the start, blasting into a 16-8 run. "Thunder" were finding it difficult to cope with the athleticism of the opposition and the dominance of their forwards who bullied "Thunder's" players close to the basket. "Thunder" were guilty of a number of sloppy plays while several players made the choice to rely on individual rather than team play to make up the deficit. Coach Rob Crump was forced to call a time out to regroup his players and "Thunder" responded with a run of their own at the conclusion of the quarter, capped with a three pointer from Carlo Nieva to lead 18-19 at the end of the first period.

The second quarter was a tight and extremely competitive, with both teams exchanging scores over the ten minutes. "Thunder" were finding it difficult to break down Albion's zone defence and containing their guard on the fast break. Unfortunately for "Thunder", a series of sloppy turnovers and poor choice of shot selection allowed Albion to take advantage the home team were able restore their lead at the half with a 37-35 score line.

Albion's defensive tactics and athletic line up continued to unsettle "Thunder" who were unable to establish any kind of momentum. Midway through the third quarter David Nieva inspired "Thunder" with some good defence and this raised the energy of the whole team. A three point score from Rhys Hill and a basket from David Nieva, had the effect of opening up the Albion's zone allowing space for Elliott Strausa and Brendan Ross to score. "Thunder" were able to take the period 21-18 to regain the lead at 56-55.

The Northants boys were well aware that their unbeaten record was under threat and needed a strong quarter. The ten minutes turned into a real scrap with both teams fiercely contesting rebounds and loose balls. In the final five minutes, excellent transition offence from "Thunder" produced a small surge which extended the lead by seven points. Albion took a time out but it was to no avail as "Thunder" were able to see out the game and record the 79-71 win.

The "Thunder" scoring was led in scoring by Rhys Hill with 25 points, and good support came from brothers David and Carlo Nieva with 15 and 13 points respectively.

Runners Up spot looms for Under 14 Boys

Under 14 Boys Midlands South West Conference

Northants "Thunder"	96 – 54	Sheffield Juniors
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When these two teams met earlier in the season the game evolved into a virtual shootout between Sheffield's guard Montgomery and "Thunder's", Jacob Round. That was a game of 'invisible' defence which "Thunder" won by 124 points to 104. Last Saturday's contest ended in a comfortable 42 points win for "Thunder" with Montgomery's contributions strictly limited thanks to the defensive efforts of a number of "Thunder" players.

The Northants team made the best possible start to game racing out to a 30-13 first quarter lead thanks to 20 points from Round. If the first period of play had been one-sided the second was even worse for the Sheffield side as they managed just nine points while "Thunder" poured in a further 29 to take an unassailable 59-18 half time lead.

The third quarter saw Ed Wallhead shining and scoring 9 personal points as "Thunder" outscored their opponents 25-19 to extend their lead to 84-37 going into the last ten minutes of play. To their credit Sheffield kept going and actually took the final period 17-12 but it was a matter of too little too late as "Thunder" cruised to a win which gives them every chance of clinching runners-up spot and a home tie in the end of season Play Offs.

In the 42 point win Round led all scorers with 39 points; Wallhead contributed 18 points while Toby Oxford and Laurence Williams chipped in with 10 and eight points respectively

Central Venue success for Northants club

The Northants Basketball Club entered three teams in last weekend's Central Venue League run by the Northants Basketball Association and staged at Northampton School for Boys. It proved to be a successful day for the Club with the Under12, Under 13 and Under 15 Boys all winning their sections.

THIS WEEKEND'S ACTION

Saturday 8th March

9-30am to 11am

Under 12 Practice

10am to 11am

Junior "Ballers"

11am to 12-30pm

Under 13 Boys Practice

11.30am

Under 14 Boys versus Mansfield "Giants"

1.30pm

Under 14 Girls versus Norfolk "Incini"

Cadette Women versus City of Birmingham

3-30pm

Junior Women versus Reading "Rockets"

Cadet Men versus City of Birmingham II

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

Spectators are welcome and admission is **FREE**

Junior Men travel to Trafford

Sunday 9th March

Senior Men travel to Sefton "Suns"

Under 14 Girls travel to NEBC "Titans"