

NORTHANTS BASKETBALL CLUB

MEDIA RELEASE

Men's National League Division 3

(North Conference)

Sefton "Suns"

(86-86)

Northants "Thunder"

98 – 97

The Northants senior men suffered their fifth defeat of the Conference season when they went down after overtime in controversial circumstances to Sefton "Suns" last Sunday. The loss means that any chance of securing runners-up spot and a home tie in the Play Offs has disappeared. Even a win against Birmingham "A's" on Saturday would only take "Thunder" to 15 wins the same as Birmingham "Mets" but the West Midlands team have a points difference advantage from the games played between the two teams. "Mets" won by 17 early in the season but lost to "Thunder" by 10 just after Christmas giving the Birmingham side a seven point advantage. "Thunder" will now travel to London Greenhouse "Pioneers" who came second in the South Conference in the 1st Round of the Play Offs. The London team lost four regular season games so a close encounter is expected.

Against Sefton, "Thunder" made a confident start to the game easing ahead by 29 points to 22 after the first quarter. That lead was reduced to three points at 42-39 by half time with "Suns" striving hard for the win which would take them into the Play Offs ahead of Leeds Carnegie.

The home side took a 61-58 lead after the third period of play which they took 22-16 and "Thunder" were left with everything to do. They responded superbly and a shot on the buzzer from Leome Francis tied the scores up at 86 all and took the game into overtime. "Thunder" got their noses in front during the extra five minutes of play at 97-96 with just 27 seconds of overtime remaining. The "Thunder" coaching staff instructed their team to keep possession and only shoot as the 24 second shot ran out. The team obeyed these instructions but with nine seconds still remaining on the shot clock a section of the crowd and possibly some of the "Suns" bench began a false 4-3-2-1 count down. "Thunder" panicked a forced up a shot which missed. Sefton rebounded the missed shot and went coast-to-coast to score a match winning dunk with "Thunder" protesting in vain.

In the heart-breaking defeat Jason Tucker once again led his team's scoring with 31 points with good support coming from Francis and Leon Henry with 24 and 21 points respectively.

Junior Men have big 'road' win

Junior Men's Premier Division North

Trafford

47 – 99

Northants "Thunder"

After two disappointing defeats where the junior men had, "Snatched defeat from the jaws of victory the team travelled up the M.6 to take on Trafford last Saturday. Trafford are the Cadet (under 16 team) of the Manchester club, and 45 minutes before the tip off of this game they had narrowly defeated Sheffield "Arrows" in their own age group.

Earlier in the season "Thunder" had beaten Trafford by 29 points but were determined not to take their opponents lightly and came on court in determined mood and thanks to a three pointer from Sam Round and two from Linas Bajournas jumped out to a 13-2 lead. Trafford showed they had no intention of, just making up the numbers and responded with a 15-8 run of their own to leave "Thunder" leading 21-17 after the first period of play.

"Thunder" had been employing a zone defence in that first period of play but for the second quarter, stand-in coach John Collins switched the team to man-to-man. Under increased pressure Trafford began to 'cough up' the ball allowing "Thunder" to launch wave after wave of fast breaks with Bajournas on hand to score seven baskets. The Northants boys took the period 30-6 to take a 51-23 half time lead.

"Thunder" continued their dominance in the third quarter extending their lead to 79-33 with rookie guard Carlo Nieva looking impressive in the back court and Bajournas adding another seven points. After a sluggish start in the final quarter which saw Trafford embark on an 8-zero run it was a similar story with Round being the main provider for Bajournas. "Thunder" took the period 20-14 to close out the game 99-47 and so record their seventh win of the season.

In the 52 points win Bajournas top scored with 41 points with excellent support coming from Round with 19 points and George Calvey with 14. Collins was quick to acknowledge the hard defensive work of the rest of the team and the nine point contributions of Nieva and Josh Round.

Win keeps Junior Women's Play Off chances alive

Junior Women's Midlands South West Conference

Northants "Lightning" 55 - 42 Reading "Rockets"

After this hard fought win for the Northants junior women the slide rules and calculators are out as the team battles for third place in the Midlands South West table. The decisive game comes this Saturday against Bucks "Hornets" but such are the complications of qualification that a win might not earn them the best percentage win / loss record they require.

Against an injury hit "Rockets" team, Coach Stacey Shakespeare's team made the best possible start scoring 14 points while 'shutting out' their opponents. "Lightning" extended their lead to 26-8 by half time thanks to a brace of three pointers from Sarah Round but in a low scoring game they knew a "Rockets" run would be enough to take the game.

Throughout the third and fourth periods of play "Rockets" had the ascendancy winning 15-12 and 19-17 but "Lightning" were able to keep their noses in front thanks to eight final quarter points from Rio Blessyn as she finished with 11 points for the game. Other major scorers for "Lightning" were, Round with 13 points and Stephanie Ogden with 11 and now comes that decisive game against "Hornets".

Cadet Men maintain 100% record

Cadet Men's Midlands Conference

Northants "Thunder" 88 - 71 City of Birmingham II

After their lacklustre performance of the previous week the Northants under 16 boys were hoping for a better showing against the City of Birmingham "Bulls" Development side. In the event it was the opposition who looked most impressive the start at the start of the game zooming out to a 12-4 lead. "Thunder" were finding it difficult to breaking down the "Bulls" 3-2 zone defence but they were motivated by a 14-2 run with Rhys Hill and Jacob Round scoring seven points each as the quarter concluded with "Thunder" holding a 20-14 lead.

The hustle and athleticism of the Birmingham team were causing "Thunder" problems and this commitment saw "Bulls" reduce the deficit by starting the quarter with 6-zero run, but some good transition offense saw Will Grosvenor and David Nieva convert lay ups to restore "Thunder's" lead. "Thunder" were struggling" to secure defensive rebounds with their players guilty of not boxing out and this resulted in the "Bulls" scoring with second chance shots. Despite these problems "Thunder" had managed to extend their lead by nine points by the end of the quarter to lead 43-34 at half time.

"Bulls" started the third quarter in assertive move surging out to a 7-zero run; with "Thunder's" situation made worse as Brendan Ross and Elliot Strausa both committing their third personal fouls. As a result Coach Crump was forced to reshuffle his line up by fielding four guards on the floor but this had a positive effect as "Thunder" were able to extend their lead thanks to the employment of a pressing defence. "Thunder" racked up 23 points in that third quarter with all the points coming from Ollie Thomas, Hill and Round.

Holding a 66-55 lead going into the final period of play "Thunder" knew C.O.B. were still in a game as the two teams exchange scores with "Thunder" clinging on to their double digit lead. "Thunder" displayed some good offense, especially with some good dribble penetration which saw Ollie Thomas fool the Bulls defence with a sneaky pass to find Brendan Ross who scored in the paint. "Thunder's" decisive breakthrough came in the final five minutes of the game as they were able to produce a 13-2 run. This included some great hustle by Jack Norridge who intercepted a pass and dribbled full court to make a lay up.

"Thunder" had been made to battle all the way for their rather flattering 17 point win which meant they extended their unbeaten record in the Midlands Conference to 18.

In the 88-71 win "Thunder's" scoring was led by Rhys Hill with 27 points, with good support coming from Jacob Round and Ollie Thomas who scored 26 and 15 points respectively.

Cadette Women win big after lethargic start

Under 16 Girls Midlands South West Conference

Northants "Lightning" 89 – 26 City of Birmingham

Reports about the Northants under 16 girl's team usually start with a one-sided first quarter followed by a gradual increase in the lead and a big victory. Against City of Birmingham last Saturday, the last two sections came to pass but after the first period of play "Lightning" were only leading 15-14 this after opening with a 13-3 charge.

In the break between quarters Coach Karen Goodrich had a few choice words to say about complacency and pride and her team responded in the best possible way winning the second quarter 37-6 to lead 52-20 at half time. If the "Lightning" defence had been as tight as a miser's money box in that second period it got even tighter in the third as C.O.B. failed to score and the home side extended their lead by a further 25 points to 77-20.

The Northants girls duly saw out the win; which had come at a price with the influential Ruchae Walton aggravating a knee injury which will see her side-lined for at least a week. In the overwhelming 63 point win Charlotte Berridge, Lauren Milne and Sarah Round led the "Lightning" scoring with 20, 19 and 15 points respectively. Eden Brown had a good all-round game; Ella King chipped in with 8 points while Harri and Nia Owens hauled down 15 rebounds between them.

"Giants" slain as Under 14 Boys move closer to Runners Up spot

Under 14 Boys Midlands Conference

Northants "Thunder" 101 – 56 Mansfield "Giants"

This comfortable win over Mansfield "Giants" gives the Northants under 14 boys an excellent chance of securing runners up spot in the Midland Conference. The other team in contention are Sheffield Juniors who like the Northants boys have one regular season left to play. Both teams face opposition from the lower reaches of the Conference so both would expect to win. This would leave both teams on thirteen wins with "Thunder" holding the ascendancy because they have beaten the Sheffield outfit twice.

Against "Giants", "Thunder" eased out to a 29-17 first quarter lead on the back of 18 points from Jacob Round. It was Round to the fore in the second period of play as well as his 21 points helped "Thunder" to take the quarter 27-15 to extend their lead to 56-32 at half time.

"Giants" needed a good start to the third quarter but they were rocked by a 15-zero "Thunder" charge which put the game beyond their reach although they did battle back with a 9-2 run to close out the quarter. At 84-49 the game was as good as over as a contest and "Thunder" duly took the final quarter 17-7 to win the game by 101 points to 56 with Round scoring 57 of those points. Two other "Thunder" players, Ed Wallhead and Laurence Williams scored in double figures both scoring 12 points.

This weekend the team travel to Coventry "Tornadoes" with that runners up spot in their sights.

Weekend of mixed fortunes for Under 14 Girls as "Titans" get local bragging rights

It was busy weekend for the Under 14 girls team as they took on Norfolk "Iceni" and then made the short journey to tackle local rivals N.E.B.C. "Titans". The girls easily beat "Iceni" but were second best to "Titans" in an enthralling contest.

Under 14 Girls Midlands South Conference

Northants "Lightning" 104 – 35 Norfolk "Iceni"

After an early debate about what constitutes legal defence at this age group a theme that was to continue the next day, "Lightning" charged out to a 26-6 first quarter lead, an advantage they were to hold until the end of the contest.

Norfolk rallied slightly in the second quarter which "Lightning" took 20-11 to extend their lead to 52-20 at half time. With Lucy Almena and Holly Winterburn looking dominant "Lightning" won the third period of play 34-8 and at 80-25 the game was as good as over as a contest. In the final stanza Bahira Bakarar came into her own with 8 personal points as "Lightning" won the period 24-10 to record a convincing 69 point win

with Winterburn scoring 40 points, Amena 24 and Bakarat 22. The win would have been even bigger had the Northants girls not missed an alarming 28 free throws.

N.E.B.C. "Titans"

56 – 53

Northants "Lightning"

Twenty-four hours later the girls were back on court at Northampton Academy to take on local rivals N.E.B.C. "Titans" in what turned out to be a very exciting game.

The two teams were evenly matched over the first two periods of play with the scores all tied up at 28 all at half time. "Lightning" had relied very heavily on Holly Winterburn during those first two periods of play while "Titans" presented a more balanced offensive threat and were far more aggressive claiming virtually all the loose balls.

During that first half "Lightning" had been handicapped by the absence of Lucy Amena who had picked up a 'dead leg' and had been unable to play. Amena came back into the game in the third quarter but her mobility was severely restricted and "Titans" were able to pay particular attention to Winterburn. "Titans" decisively won the period 20-6 with their 'Help' defence looking increasingly like a Box & One.

With a 14 point lead in a low scoring game "Titans" were hot favourites to take the win. "Lightning" coaches, Karen Goodrich and Stacey Shakespeare summoned one last effort from their team and they responded superbly. Up-court pressure forced a number of "Titans" turn-overs and easy scores and as the gap closed the large contingent of "Titans" supporters began to get a little edgy but despite losing the last quarter 19-8 the home team held on for the three point win.

For the second game running Winterburn had a 40 point haul but no other "Lightning" player could get into double figures while for "Titans", Paige Vyse had an impressive all round game in scoring 22 points.

THIS WEEKEND'S ACTION

Saturday 15th March

9-30am to 11am

Under 12 Practice

10am to 11am

Junior "Ballers"

11.30am

Cadet Men versus Birmingham "Mets"

1-30pm

Junior Women versus Bucks "Hornets"

3-30pm

Junior Men versus Cheshire "Wire"

5-30pm

Senior Men versus Birmingham "A's"

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**

Under 11 and Girls Central Venue League at Northampton School for Boys

Cadette Women travel to Bromsgrove "Bears"

Under 14 Boys travel to Coventry "Tornadoes"