

# **NORTHANTS BASKETBALL CLUB**

## **PRESS RELEASE**

The Northants senior men completed their National League programme with two games last weekend. On Saturday they went down to Hackney “White Heat” by 13 points but closed their campaign with a convincing victory over Cardiff “Archers” the next day.

### **Senior Men’s Division 3**

#### **(South Conference**

**Hackney “White Heat**

**84 – 71**

**Northants “Thunder”**

Thunder started the game in positive mood, managing to gain dominance on the offensive boards, as Hackney looked half asleep on defence. However, the away team’s defence looked out of sorts, and gave up a number of high percentage shots, which kept Hackney in the game. After a high scoring first quarter which saw Thunder trailing 26-27, emphasis was placed on defensive responsibilities for Northants, but the request fell upon deaf ears. The offensive pairing of Hadley and Holt kept the Thunder within a single figure deficit at half time, but the scoreboard represented the fact that Hackney were scoring with ease, and the home side lead 47-38.

Although Hackney started the third very strongly, the second half was a much closer affair, with Northants clawing the score back to 70-61 mid way through the final period of play, after trailing by as many as 14 points. Holt continued to be his persistent self, well backed up once more by Henry and Hadley, but unfortunately Thunder fell short, and their last away game summed up their away woes this season, where one bad period early in the game means an up-hill struggle for the rest of the game.

In the 13 point loss Holt top scored with 19 points with good support coming from Henry and Dan Turiccki with 14 points apiece.

**Northants “Thunder”**

**101 – 67**

**Cardiff “Archers”**

Thunder welcomed Cardiff into their own venue for their last game of the season, still smarting from the fact that they had been forced to forfeit the away game, after some ‘administrative decisions’ by Basketball England.

Cardiff arrived with just six players, none of whom looked ready to match Thunder’s athleticism and speed, so the game plan was to try to run Cardiff off the floor. The plan initially worked with Thunder quickly getting out to a double digit lead, scoring from fast breaks, and good ball movement in their half court offence. However, Cardiff never looked like throwing the towel in, and when Northants’ game turned incredibly individualised, Cardiff pulled the deficit back to single figures, and it looked to be ‘game on’ with a half time score of 40-34 in favour of Thunder.

There were some stern words from players and coaches in the Northants camp at half time. There was clarification about what the ‘team ethos’ and ‘hustle intensity’ the team had been about all season, and put a few more smiles on faces. The relaxed, but determined spirit in the second half was arguably the best 20 minutes, the Northants men’s team had put together all season. Thunder scored in a number of ways, with all players getting on the score sheet. Whether it was a thunderous dunk by Turiccki or Holt at the end of a fast break, a sweet connection from deep from Hadley, Thomas or Yates after some good ball movement, or some ‘lock up defence’ from Adams, Henry and under 18 guard Ollie Thomas, the small crowd were treated to an excellent display that had Northants Coaches Yates and Eddon scratching their heads thinking “Where had this been all season?”

Northants ran out comfortable 101-67 winners, after Benji Henry completed another fast break finish pushing Northants over the 100 point mark. Henry finished with a 19 point haul a total matched by Turiccki with the Thunder scoring led for the second day running, by Jacob Holt with a 24 points total

Northants finish the season with a 7-11 record, placing them mid-table, but with the clear knowledge that they had been in contention with each team that had reached the playoffs, during those respective fixtures.

## **“Lightning” end the season with a double loss**

### **Senior Women’s Division 2**

#### **(North Conference)**

**Northants “Lightning”                      44 – 72                      Sheffield “Hatters II”**

For the second week running the Northants senior women faced ‘champions elect’, Sheffield Hatters II and for the second week running ended up on the wrong end of the score line.

Needing a good start to the game Lightning looked lethargic on offence while for Sheffield England junior international Georgia Gayle scored 13 points to help her team to a 22-11 lead after the first period of play.

On either side of half time Lightning showed they could be competitive against the best team in the Conference only losing the combined second and third quarters 23-27. Going into the final period Lightning trailed 34-49 and Coach Karen Goodrich asked her players for one last push but they were unable to respond the Hatters second string outscoring the Northants girls 23-10 to run out winners by 72 points to 44.

In the 28 point loss Stephanie Ogden and Nael Cali top scored for Lightning with 11 points apiece. Natasha Wesley battled hard for her 8 points and collected five rebounds while under 16 player Caitlin Stewart put in a solid shift at both ends of the court.

**Northants “Lightning”                      45 -53                      Loughborough Student “Riders II”**

Lightning completed their season with a game against Loughborough Riders II a team that had already secured second place in the North Conference. When junior Stephanie Ogden drained a three-pointer and cadette Ruchae Walton converted one of two free throws at the end of the third period of play, Lightning found themselves leading 38-36.

Lightning had played some excellent team defence to restrict Riders to just six points in that third quarter but they were unable to maintain their efforts in the final stanza. After Ogden had netted another three pointer; Lightning’s man to man defence was destroyed by Delaney who scored after cutting off screens inside the keyway. Lightning switched back to their zone defence but failed to match up on Reyes and Rogan who scored from the perimeter to seal victory for the visitors.

In the eight point set back Ogden top scored with 16 points while Nael Cali and Rionan Blessyn made useful contributions.

In their first season in the National League, Lightning have finished 7<sup>th</sup> in the North Conference and after their last game Coach Karen Goodrich observed, “The game against Loughborough and the one we played just before Christmas against the same opposition, shows that at our best we could compete with any team in the Conference.”

## **Junior Women clinch Conference title with win over “Rockets”**

### **Junior Women’s Midland South West Conference**

**Northants “Lightning”                      80 – 53                      Reading “Rockets”**

With just two games remaining of the regular season the Northants junior women secured the Midland South-West Conference title with a 27 points win over Reading Rockets Academy. This season the Northants juniors have practiced with and played on the senior women’s team and this has undoubtedly made them a tougher, more hard-noised team. In last Saturday’s game eight of Coach Stacey Shakespeare’s nine players contributed to the 80 point total led by Stephanie Ogden who scored 27 personal points. Caitlin Stewart and Rionan Blessyn both scored in double figures while Lauren Brookes, Harri Owens and Ruchae Walton who was returning after injury all made significant contributions.

Lightning made a good start to the game easing out to a 19-12 lead after the first quarter with Ogden, Owens and Stewart scoring freely. Rockets rallied well in the second period of play which they took 22-16 to reduce Lightning’s lead to one point at 35-34 at half time.

The Rockets effort had been seriously affected by an injury to one of their key players and Lightning were able to capitalise on their opponent’s loss in the third quarter. A 15-zero blitz led by three back to back three pointers from Ogden, gave them a 62-44 lead going into the final period of play and leaving Rockets too much to do. Lightning continued to play excellent defence in the final quarter which they won 18-9 to run out winners by 80 points to 53.

The Northants girls travel to Gloster Jets this Saturday and will play Jets twice before entering end of season Play off play.

### **Short handed Cadet Men too strong for “Outlaws”**

#### **Under 16 Boys Midland Conference**

**Ilkeston “Outlaws”                      48 – 76                      Northants “Thunder”**

A combination of injuries and academic commitments meant the Northants cadet boys travelled to Morley to take on Ilkeston Outlaws with just six players one of them debutant Ed Taylan from the under 15 team.

Seeing how short-handed Thunder were the Outlaws coaching staff decided to play a full court press in the hope of tiring the Northants boys. In theory this might have seemed a good idea but they hadn't counted on the dribbling and shooting skills of Thunder's David Nieva. Time and time again the diminutive guard dribbled through the Ilkeston press and when he wasn't scoring himself he was dishing off the ball to team mates to convert. Thunder jumped out to a 27-14 lead by the end of the period leaving Outlaws a lot to do in the rest of the game.

Thunder continued to hold sway in the second quarter but against Outlaw's half court zone offence their scoring was more restricted. Leading 39-18 Thunder's usually effective match up zone defence was breached time and time again. Outlaws went on an 11-5 run to trail 29-44 at half time.

Coach John Collins was aware that the home side had become used to Thunder's zone defence so he switched his team to man to man for the third quarter. The effect was immediate with Outlaws kept scoreless for fully six minutes and restricted to just one basket in the whole quarter while Thunder increased their total by 17 points.

Leading 61-31 going into the final period of play the game was as good as over as a contest but from the start it was apparent that fatigue was beginning to play a part as Outlaws went on a 12-zero run against some tiring legs. Collins switched back to a zone defence and his team outscored their opponents 15-5 over the next five minutes to run out comfortable winners by 28 points.

For Thunder, Nieva closed the game with 31 points, while Ayo Oluyede contributed 18 points. Excellent support came from Hayden Sayers and Taylan with 11 and 10 points respectively while Emmanuel Arimoro and Robert Clarke 'worked their socks off' on defence and rebounded superbly.

### **Under 14 Boys win ugly against “Giants”**

#### **Under 14 Boys Midlands Conference**

**Mansfield “Giants”                      68 - 82                      Northants “Thunder”**

Some junior basketball games are an absolute joy; but this was not one of them. Although the Northants under 14 boys had already secured second place in the league, there was a chance that a win could earn a home fixture in the first round of the playoffs, so there was still a job to be done. However, Thunder's performance was well below their normal standard and they failed to take control of the game against a team that they'd beaten comfortably earlier in the season.

Thunder were only one point better than Mansfield after the first quarter and two points better by half-time. It was exactly the same story in the third quarter as Thunder extended their league by another point. In the final period, Coach Round was forced to go strong, which was enough to open up more of a gap between the two teams. As the clock ran out, the score was 82-68 in Thunder's favour. The 'Big Three', Wallhead, Lloyd and Amankonah scored the majority of the team's points scoring 28, 25 and 14 respectively.

During the course of the game there were a string of questionable calls and non-calls from the officials, a blatant and shameful attempt by the Mansfield coach to try to deceive the referee, and some poor finishing from the Northants boys. During his post-match team talk, Coach Round described it as, “A win, but not a very satisfying one”.

The team should be proud of what it has achieved during the regular season and, having made it to the last 16 in the country, it now has a few weeks to prepare for what is likely to be a tough road trip to play Bradford Dragons.

## **Under 14 Girls stay unbeaten with big win over “Titans”**

### **Under 14 Girls Midlands Conference**

**N.E.B.C. “Titans”**

**49 - 89**

**Northants “Lightning”**

The Northants under 14 girls completed a treble over N.E.B.C. Titans with a commanding win over their local rivals at Northampton Academy last Sunday. Playing the same team three times is never easy because both teams are aware of each other's weakness but Lightning didn't let that slow them down and after Holly Winterburn was fouled after she hit a deep three-pointer and nailed the free throw to complete the four point play they went on a 20-5 blitz.

The team girls carried the momentum into the second quarter with Lucy Amena and Hannah Davy showing they were a handful with driving to basket. Lightning took the second period 21-12 to take a 43-23 half time lead.

In the third period of play Coach Stacey Shakespeare asked her team to switch to half court defence and so get used to playing defence once all five players were back. With the pressure off the Titans girls got a lot more comfortable and Lightning were only able to edge the quarter 12-8

Shakespeare had some firm words for the Lightning players before the start of the final quarter and this had the effect of ‘putting the fire back in their bellies’. The whole team showed how hard they were prepared to work at both ends of the floor and their commitment to run was reflected in the final score. All ten players made a big contribution to this win, but the main scorers on the day were Holly Winterburn with 49 points including five three-pointers, with excellent support coming from Lucy Amena and Hannah Davy with 15 and 10 points respectively.

With just one Conference game remaining thoughts are turning to the Play Offs. Coach Shakespeare has identified lots of things to work on in preparation for the Play Offs and with Lightning hitting just nine of 24 free throws that might well be one of them.

### **THIS WEEKEND'S ACTIVITIES**

#### **Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> March**

9.30 am until 10.30 am

“Ballers” Academy and Junior “Ballers” session

10.30 am until 11.00 am

“Ballers” Presentation Ceremony

11-45 am

Under 15 Boys versus N.A.S.A.

1<sup>st</sup> Round Play Off game

1-45 pm

Under 14 Girls versus Bucks “Hornets”

Both 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 Women travel to Gloster “Jets”

Cadet Boys travel to Leicester “Warriors”

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