

NORTHANTS BASKETBALL CLUB

MEDIA RELEASE

Senior men scrape past “A’s” four

Men’s National League Division 3 (North Conference)

Northants “Thunder” 83 – 78 Birmingham “A’s”

To all intents and purpose this was a classic ‘dead’ game for both teams. After the previous week’s defeat at Sefton, “Thunder” were condemned to third place in the North Conference while “A’s” chances of making the Play offs disappeared several weeks ago.

“A’s” commitment to the game was clearly illustrated as they fielded just six players one of whom was a player / coach. After conceding a couple of three-pointers early in the game, “Thunder” went on a 17-3 charge and a routine victory looked to be on the cards despite “A’s” closing the gap to six points by the end of the first quarter.

Two free throws from Jacob Holt and a lay up from Jonny Yates at the start of the second quarter extended the lead to double figures and then the proverbial roof collapsed. Whether it was complacency or a superb “A’s” effort is debatable but the visitors embarked on a 14-zero run to take a 33-29 lead and from then on it was an uphill struggle. The two teams exchanged baskets before Birmingham closed the period with an 8-zero run to take a 48-38 half time lead.

A “Thunder” charge was expected in the third quarter but despite their best efforts this just wasn’t forthcoming and by now a totally relaxed “A’s” outfit had an appetite for the fight. By the end of the period they had extended their lead by one further point to 65-54 and by now the “Thunder” fans were beginning to get a little worried. Their mood was deepened when Zaleckas hit seven quick points to extend “A’s” lead to 72-54 but at this stage “Thunder” seemed to utter a collective, “Enough is enough” and a 19-1 run brought the scores level at 73 all. “A’s” responded with five points from Kassama but they then lost two players on five fouls and against four defenders, “Thunder” closed with a 10-zero spurt to win the game by a rather flattering five points.

For “Thunder”, Leome Francis led their scoring with 22 points with Jason Tucker contributing 21 and Jonny Yates 14 while Jacob Holt and Richard Higgins did a good job on the defensive boards.

As indicated in last week’s report “Thunder” will travel to London Greenhouse “Pioneers” who lost just four games in claiming runners up spot in the South Conference. That game will be played next Sunday with a 5pm tip off.

Defence the key as Junior Women beat “Hornets”

Junior Women’s Midlands South West Conference

Northants “Lightning” 66 - 41 Bucks “Hornets”

After a decisive victory over Bucks “Hornets” the Play Off fate of the Northants junior women is now in the ‘laps of the gods’. “Lightning” have clinched third place in the Midlands South-West Conference but only the best two third placed teams will advance to the Play Offs. “Lightning” currently has a .60 win, loss record which is inferior to both Cheshire and Southend with the latter team still having three games to play.

“Lightning’s” success over “Hornets” on Saturday was based on a sound defensive performance especially in the first and fourth periods of play. After the first quarter “Lightning” had eked out a 16-7 lead but the visitors came charging back 19-16 in the second quarter with “Lightning” heavily dependent on rookie guard Sarah Round who netted 10 of their points. Leading 32-26 at half time “Lightning” were slightly concerned because Round had picked up a knee injury and was sidelined.

The third quarter was one of 9-2 runs with “Hornets” taking the lead at 35-34 after their charge only to be pegged back by “Lightning’s” surge with Stephanie Ogden scoring eight of her teams 11 points. Trailing by just six points going into the last quarter the visitors were still in with a chance of snatching a win but “Lightning” and especially Lauren Brookes had other ideas. After Obiamako had added two baskets for “Hornets” the Northants girls kept their opponents scoreless for the last seven minutes of the game and thanks to eight points from Brookes ran out comfortable winners by 66 points to 41.

Round led the “Lightning” scoring with 15 points before her enforced exit with good support coming from Ogden and Brookes with 14 and 10 points respectively. Coach Stacey Shakespeare was delighted with her team’s performance and highlighted the excellent defensive rebounding of Rio Blessyn and Tara Hings who also chipped in with 9 and 8 points respectively.

Brave Junior Men lose to Conference leaders in last minute

Junior Men’s Premier Division North

Northants “Thunder” 80 – 90 Cheshire “Wire”

For the third time in recent weeks the Northants junior men got to within touching distance of a team from the higher echelons of the Conference before falling at the final hurdle. With less than a minute of Saturday’s game against Cheshire “Wire”, “Thunder” were trailing by just two points at 80-82. At that stage their leading scorer Linas Bajournas was called for his fifth foul. He questioned the call in Lithuanian but unfortunately the referee was Lithuanian and understood the blasphemy and duly awarded him a technical foul. “Wire’s”, Miller converted all four of the ensuing free throws to put the Cheshire team ahead by six points. “Thunder” Coach, John Collins called a time out and drew up an out of bounds play but to his horror the referee ordered his team to in bound the game from the wrong place and the resulting shot was unsuccessful. “Thunder” fouled to stop a score but “Wire were once again accurate from the free throw line and it was game over.

“Wire” needed a win over “Thunder” to secure the Conference title but they soon realised that it wasn’t going to be the sixty plus point blow out it had been when the team met just before Christmas. “Thunder” were able to contain their opponents with some aggressive zone defence and break effectively off that zone with Sam Round dishing out numerous assists to Bajournas. “Thunder” trailed 36-48 at half time but the team had shown themselves able to compete with the Conference leaders. “Thunder” edged the third period of play 13-12 to give themselves even more belief and when Round stopped and popped inside the “Wire” keyway to get his team to within two points “Thunder” really did believe they could pull off the shock of the season. Then came that disastrous last 56 seconds leaving just dreams of what might have been plus a great deal of pride after their last game of the season.

In the ten point defeat Bajournas scored 37 points while Round contributed 19 and George Paul 13.

Cadet Men one win away from the perfect season

Cadet Men’s Midlands Conference

Northants “Thunder” 79 – 34 Birmingham “Mets”

Denied the services of three players, Coach Rob Crump drafted in three players David Nieva, Ayo Oluyede and Hayden Sayers from the Club’s Under 15 team. With “Thunder” all set to go they were kept waiting by the late arrival of the visitors, Birmingham “Mets”. Once the game got underway the two teams exchanged baskets before aggressive full court defense from “Thunder” forced consecutive turnovers from the West Midlands team sparking a 16-2 “Thunder” run to conclude the quarter. During the first quarter the “Thunder” big men Oluyede, Brendan Ross, and Elliott Strausa had looked impressive combining for 14 of Thunder's 22 first quarter points.

Leading 22-9, “Thunder” were hoping to extend their lead in the second period of play but despite frequently rotating and frequently changing their defences they were unsettled by Birmingham’s 2-3 zone. Sayers made some good contributions with his hustle on defence but despite some good work from Ross and Strausa the visitors edged the quarter 14-13 to reduce “Thunder’s” lead to 35-23.

It was a very different “Thunder” that hit the floor for the third quarter Rhys Hill opened the period with a three pointer, then after the two teams had exchanged scores, “Thunder” were able to keep “Mets” scoreless for the rest of the quarter. “Thunder” embarked on a 20-zero run to extend their lead to 62-27 by then end of the period.

With the game out of reach for “Mets”, Crump urged his team to restrict the visitors to single figures in the final stanza. His team responded superbly demonstrating some good defense by putting opposing players under pressure as well as controlling the defensive boards. “Thunder” were able to capitalise in transition

with guards Ollie Thomas and Will Grosvenor running in lay ups as “Thunder” took the quarter 17-8. The second half score was 44-12 to “Thunder” as they cruised 79-34 win their 19th of the campaign.

In the 45 point win, Thunder’s scoring was led by Elliott Strausa and Brendan Ross who scored 17 and 16 points respectively. Ollie Thomas supported well with 10 points, whilst Under 15 players David Nieva and Ayo Oduyede demonstrated a solid scoring performance of 9 points each.

That win clinches the Midlands Conference title for “Thunder” but this Saturday they face second placed Birmingham “A's” who be doing their best to prevent “Thunder” going a perfect 20 and 0.

Perfectly, patchy Cadette Women tame the “Bears”

Under 16 Girls Midlands South West Conference

Bromsgrove “Bears” 32 – 59 Northants “Lightning”

Like the Cadet Boys, the “Lightning” Under 16 girls also have a perfect Conference record. The team completed their regular season with a routine win over Bromsgrove “Bears” but for the second week running Coach Karen Goodrich had to have stern words with the team at half time. At this stage “Lightning” were only leading 27-21, this after losing the first quarter 13-11. “Lightning’s” half time lead came thanks to a 12-zero run, which came at the end of the period after a lack-lustre 15 minutes.

Without the services of guard Sarah Round (on duty with the club’s junior team) and Ruchae Walton (injured), Lightning’s play lacked spark but they easily won the second half of the game 32-11 to run out winners by 61 points to 34.

In the 27 points win “Lightning’s” scoring was led by Lauren Milne with 17 points, she also pulled down seven rebounds. Caitlin Stewart was her usual consistent self completing a double-double with 12 points and 11 rebounds while rookie Holly Winterburn added energy to “Lightning’s” play and scored 8 points

Under 14 Boys clinch Runners Up spot

Under 14 Boys Midlands Conference

Coventry “Tornadoes” 53 – 112 Northants “Thunder”

This convincing win over lowly Coventry “Tornadoes” secured runners-up spot in the Midlands Conference for the Northants under 14 boys. That means a home tie in the 1st Round of the Play Offs against Cheshire “Panthers” in two weeks time.

Against “Tornadoes”, “Thunder” jumped out to a 30-14 lead after the first quarter and by half time this lead had been extended to 52-30. With Jacob Round proving to be a handful for the Coventry defence, Tyler Mutensango and rookie Ed Wallhead were able to find numerous scoring opportunities and helped “Thunder” to win the third period of play 26-17.

At 78-47 “Tornadoes” had done pretty well but they were totally blown away in the final stanza which “Thunder” took 34-6 to record their eighth win on the trot and secure that precious runners up spot.

In the 59 point win Round scored 39 points and Wallhead 25 with Mutensango and Zav Kitchen both contributing 15 points.

CVL success for Club

Three teams from the Northants club made the short journey to Northampton School for Boys last Saturday to participate in the Northants Central Venue Leagues. The club’s two under 11 teams were placed 1st and 2nd while the Under 15 girls were also winners.

Eight mini players from club make county team

This Sunday a team representing Northamptonshire will play in the East Midlands Regional Mini Basketball Tournament. The Northants basketball Club will have representatives in both the boys and girls teams.

Chloe Almena, Poppy Barnet and Amber Martin will play for the girl's team while Kalonji Campbell, Ashley Kitchen, Oskar Knight, Jonathan Ntumba and Avisran Rekala will pull on the county kit for the boy's team

THIS WEEKEND'S ACTION

Saturday 22nd March

9-30am to 11am	Under 12 Practice
10am to 11am	Junior "Ballers"
11am to 12.30pm	Under 13 Practice
11-30am	Cadet Men versus Birmingham "A's"
1-00pm	Under 15 Boys versus Herts "Warriors" (Challenge game)
1-30pm	Under 14 Girls versus Brentwood "Fire"

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**

Sunday 23rd March

Senior Men travel to London Greenhouse "Pioneers" (3rd Division Play Off 1st Round)