

NORTHANTS BASKETBALL CLUB

PRESS RELEASE

Brave “Thunder” go down in overtime

Bracknell ‘Cobras’ VCARS Division 4 Play Off Semi Final Northants “Thunder”
(81-81) 100 - 95

Just seven months ago a decision was made to establish a men’s team within the Northants Basketball Club. Since then the team has reached the quarter final of the National Shield where they lost to the eventual winners, won the Midland Conference and on Saturday got so, so close to the eventual Division Four Play Off winners. A great deal of credit is due to the commitment of the players and the coaching staff of Rob Eddon and Grahame Yates.

At last weekend’s Play Offs staged at Leeds Carnegie University, “Thunder” made a good start against the South Conference winners Bracknell “Cobras” displaying a great deal of energy in their full court man-to-man press. The lead changed hands throughout the first period of lay which “Thunder” edged 22-20.

This same pattern continued throughout the second quarter but during the last three minutes “Thunder” were guilty if turning the ball over on a number of occasions. “Cobras” capitalised on these errors going on an 11-2 run to take a 50-41 half time lead.

The “Thunder” half time team talk was very simple, “Get back to playing in the style that brought success in the Conference, high energy, defensive hustle, fast break offence and aggressive rebounding. The Northants team responded superbly with Asher Kirby leading by example and the impetus of the game began to swing in “Thunder’s” favour. When Bracknell’s influential Odulaja fouled out of the game the Northants team felt that victory was a very real possibility.” Thunder” took the third quarter 18-8 to take a 59-58 lead into the last ten minutes of lay.

In the final quarter Bracknell showed their experience by slowing down the tempo of the game and getting the ball to their ‘big’ man John Macauley. The two teams traded baskets but with “Thunder” leading 81-79 and two seconds left to play, Mcauley was fouled whilst scoring leaving him with the bonus shot to win the game for his team. To the relief of the “Thunder” players, coaching staff and fans Big John missed the shot so the game went into overtime.

The five minute overtime period saw both sides in the penalty and a number of key players in foul trouble. This meant that defence went out of the window as both teams went hell bent for the win. “Thunder” continued with their high tempo play and possibly fatigue was responsible for some missed shots while “Cobras” adopted their slower more controlled approach. In the overtime period an amazing 33 points were scored with “Cobras” edging it 19-14 to take the title by 100 points to 95.

In an incredibly exciting game the “Thunder” scoring was led by Jason Tucker and Leon Henry with 22 and 21 points respectively. Leome Francis scored 15 points and pulled down 10 rebounds while the Yates brothers Matt and Jonny scored 11 and 10 points.

Junior Women storm into 2nd Round of Play Offs

Junior Women’s Play Off 1st Round
Junior Women 60 – 51 Southend “Swifts”

The Northants junior women advanced to the 2nd Round of the Play Offs thanks to a battling win over Southend “Swifts” last Saturday. The team is made up of four genuine junior players backed up by players from the under 16 team so this achievement is very much down to way Coach Stacey Shakespeare has juggled her paying combinations and produced a very competitive outfit. The team will now travel to Bury “Blue Devils” who won the North Conference, in the 2nd Round this coming weekend.

The game against Southend "Swifts" was a close run affair for the first three period of play at which stage "Lightning" held a four points lead at 42-38. At one stage in the second quarter "Lightning" were hit by an 8-zero run and at that stage young guards Amy Boot and Steph Ogden were able to steady the ship to get their team back into the lead at 26-25 by half time.

"Lightning" increased their lead by a further three points in the third quarter with Rio Blassyn and Lois Bain beginning to dominate the defensive boards and launching Ogden on a number of fast break attacks. Southend were becoming frustrated by some of the refereeing decisions and this seriously affected their play in the final period of play. Three-point shots from Ogden and Lauren Brookes were hammer blows as "Swifts" strived to close the gap but the Northants girls were able to hold on for the 60 points to 51 victory.

In the nine points win Steph Ogden top scored with 21 points well supported by skipper Izzy Johns with 12 while the rebounding of Lois Bain and Rio Blessyn were major factors in the win.

Both Northants Cadette Women's teams reach the Play Off 2nd Round

"Lightning Too" much for "Jets"

Cadette Women's Play Off 1st Round

Northants "Lightning Too" 78 - 57 Cheshire "Panthers"

With both teams finishing 3rd in their respective Conferences a tight game was expected and so it proved in the first period of play. Both teams made a tentative start to the game with a plethora of missed shots and errors. "Jets" were the first team to settle and by the end of the period had taken a 14-11 lead.

"Jets" had been sitting in a zone defence and in the first quarter "Lightning Too" had been guilty of taking too many early shots. The message from Coach Stacey Shakespeare to her players for the second period of play was to be more patient and if necessary make an extra pass in order to move the Cheshire defence in and create easier shooting opportunities. The Northants girls responded well and took the lead early in the second quarter but their defence was rather porous and the teams exchanged baskets. Shakespeare took a time out and demanded a better defensive effort and this is exactly what she got. The increased defensive effort generated a number of "Panthers" turn-overs leading to easy scores and "Lightning Too" went on a devastating 19-4 charge to take a 38-24 half time lead.

It was important that "Lightning Too" maintained their defensive intensity for the remainder of the game and in the third quarter this was combined by important points scoring contributions from five players led by six from Tara Hings. At 58-41 going into the final period of play the game was for "Lightning Too" to lose but with Steph Ogden on hand to close out the game that was never going to happen. Ogden scored 12 personal points in the final stanza as her team cruised into the 2nd Round of the Play Offs and a tough looking away game against Manchester "Mystics"

In the 21point win Ogden led the scoring with 22 points with good support coming from Amy Boot with 16 points, while Lauren Brookes and Tara Hings scored 15 and 13 points respectively while Rio Blessyn, Hings and Crysta Maphosa rebounded superbly for their team.

"Junk" defence decides it for "Lightning"

Northants "Lightning" 55 - 45 Trafford

When Trafford's Freya Kelshaw connected with a long range jump shot early in the fourth quarter to take her side to within four points of the Northants "Lightning" under 15 girls team the alarm bells began to ring on the Northants bench. Up until that time Kelshaw and team mate Hannah Swindells had scored 30 of their team's 40 points. "Lightning" Coach Karen Goodrich reacted immediately by calling a time out and drew up a combination defence which involved the two Trafford scorers being marked man-to-man supported by a three player zone behind them.

Initially it looked as this 'junk' defence was doomed when Trafford's Eadsworth swished a three pointer from a gap in the zone but for the next three minutes the visitors went scoreless and "Lightning" were able to close out a ten point victory that takes them into the 2nd Round of the Play Offs where they will face Haringey "Angels".

Early in the game "Lightning" had looked comfortable against a young Trafford team and using a combination of man-to-man and zone defences established a 29-16 lead midway through the second quarter. Trafford responded well and backed by their vociferous supporters reduced the deficit to ten points at 33-23 at half time.

Suddenly the confidence drained from the “Lightning” players as Trafford staged a 7-2 charge and at 35-30 midway through the third period of play it was ‘game on’. The two teams exchanged baskets through the rest of the quarter with “Lightning” boosted by two breakaway scores from Charlotte Berridge in the final minute. Then came that dramatic start to the final quarter, Goodrich’s decisive tactical switch combined with the “Lightning” supporters finding their voice and getting behind their favourites.

In the ten point win Berridge top scored with 14 points with good support coming from Sarah Round and Lauren Milne with 11 and 10 points respectively. Caitlin Stewart and Ruchae Walton both made important scoring contributions while these two plus Milne hauled down an incredible 52 rebounds between them. Coach Goodrich was also quick to recognise the energy given by players coming off the bench and the defensive work of Round and Stewart in that ‘junk’ defence.

Below par Under 14 Girls beaten by Ipswich

Under 14 Girls Play Off 1st Round

Northants “Lightning” 58 – 61 Ipswich “Bobcats”

Having already met on two occasions this season in the Midlands South Conference both teams knew what to expect in this Play Off game which disappointingly saw teams from the same conference pitted against each other. Both Conference games had gone the way of the Northants girls but thanks to a productive third quarter this key game went the way of “Bobcats”.

The two teams were very evenly matched with Ipswich’s looking impressive close to basket while “Lightning” relied heavily on their transitional offence. The score was tied at 14 all after the first period of play but at the start of the second quarter “Lightning” went on a 10-zero charge to take a 24-14 lead then “Bobcats” responded well with 9-zero run of their own to reduce the “Lightning” lead to 34-27 at half time.

The two teams exchanged baskets at the start of the third quarter but leading 42-33 things went ‘pear shaped’ for the Northants girls. Offensively they became too reliant on individual efforts rather than team work while the Ipswich ‘Bigs’ Cooney and Musson had a field day close to basket. “Bobcats” outscored “Lightning” 18-4 over the last five minutes to take a 51-46 lead into the final quarter.

This lead was extended to 57-46 early in the last period of play before “Lightning” finally came to life. Their defence became more aggressive and with better ball movement their offence became more effective. An unlikely comeback win looked to be a possibility but “Lightning” were able to take their chance missing no less than eight of the ten free throws they were awarded in last five minutes of play as Ipswich held on for the three point win.

In the disappointing loss Ruchae Walton scored 21 points and completed a double-double with 11 rebounds. Sarah Round scored 16 points while Caitlin Stewart and Abbi Hobbs contributed 9 and 8 points respectively.

East of England Under 13 Girls League

Northants “Lightning” 39 – 77 Southend “Swifts”

Just a week ago the Northants under 13 girls lost heavily to a Southend “Swifts” team that benefits from utilising girls who attend basketball playing schools. It was almost a repeat performance at the Basketball Centre last Saturday as a talented well drilled “Swifts” team dominated all four periods of play against a game but inexperienced “Lightning” team.

Team coach Darius Maldutis recognises that there is a lot of work to be done over the summer but feels that several of the players have made considerable progress throughout the current season.

In last Saturday’s game Bahira Amrbarakat and Holly Winterburn top scored for “Lightning” with 14 points apiece while Ellie Solomon scored six points.

Five “Junior Ballers” win awards

During the course of the season thirty young players aged 4 to 8 years of age have been taught the game of basketball by a team of young players from the Club led by Ben Knight. Last Saturday was the last session of the current season and it concluded with all the players receiving a certificate. The coaches then gave awards to five of the “Ballers” for their hard work, talent and good attitude. The award winners were:

Riley Culverhouse

Max Elms

Harry Goodrich - Owen

Ethan Round

Ollie Sturman - Coombs

THIS WEEK'S ACTION

Saturday 20th April

Under 15 Girls travel to Haringey “Angels”

Also during the weekend the Cadette Women will travel to Manchester “Mystics” and the Junior Women will travel to Bury “Blue Devils” with final dates still to be arranged