

NORTHANTS BASKETBALL CLUB

PRESS RELEASE

Senior Men make it Ten + 0

VACARS Division 4 Midlands Conference

Northants “Thunder” 101 – 58 Loughborough Student “Riders II”

The Northants senior men completed a routine win over a young Loughborough Students “Riders II” to take their Conference record to 10 and zero and virtually secure the Midlands Conference title.

A ‘three-pointer’ by Leon Henry at the very beginning of the game, combined with tremendous defensive pressure from Thunder's guards (brothers Yates and Yates) opened up a gap that, in reality, was never going to be clawed back. When “Riders” guards did manage to get past their counterparts, they came face to face with Jason Tucker and Leome Francis who dominated the paint at both ends - Francis getting a number of blocks and Tucker rebounding offensively with ease. Only two threes from “Riders” guard 'Slack' kept them within touching distance as Thunder took the quarter 26-17.

The “Thunder” coaching staff knew that “Riders” hadn't really got anyone to match the strength of “Thunder” close to basket, and it didn't take long for “Thunder” big men Francis, Stannard and Holt to click on to the fact. Thunder dominated at both ends, as they went on 9-0 & 10-0 runs at either end of the quarter, to widen the gap to 53-26 at half time. During the play Henry and Francis had finished off fast break plays with dunks that brought the crowd to their feet, but as we will see the best was yet to come.

As with many games that are 'over' by half time, “Thunder” made problems for themselves in the third quarter as discipline sometimes wavered with fast break passes being rushed, and defensive intensity dropping at times. However, defensive lynchpin Kirby and Cadet guard Matt Yates combined for five scores to edge the period by 23-18.

With a “Thunder's” largest crowd of the season becoming a little quiet on the sidelines, it was dunks by Francis and Henry on the break that woke up anyone who had thought the game was in cruise control. Another Under 18 guard, Luke Lewis had kitted up for his debut, and signed in by hitting a big “three pointer” off the break, taking the score to 99, and the crowd responded with their largest cheer of the game. Little did they know that guard Jonny Yates had drawn up his own special play, and in the next offence he threw up a huge alley-hoop for high flying Jacob Holt to ‘throw down’ in traffic. The score board clicked into triple digits, to the delight of all those that watched, and brought the “Thunder” bench to their feet.

In the comprehensive win Leome Francis top scored with 22 points while Leon Henry contributed 18 points. Other notable performances came from Jacob Holt with 15 points and Jonny Yates with 13 points but the “Thunder” coaching staff made special mention of Jason Tucker who scored 12 points, played tenacious defence and led the team superbly.

Junior Men ‘down’ table topping “Panthers

Junior Men’s Premier Division North

Northants “Thunder” 84 82 Cheshire “Panthers”

The Northants Junior Men produced a major shock at the Basketball Centre last Sunday when they got the better of the previously unbeaten Cheshire “Panthers” in a thrilling encounter.

“Thunder” started with good energy in a set defence, but Panthers really showed their class in their transition offence, jumping out to a 14-5 lead and putting the pressure on the home side. A time-out and a quiet word from Coach Rob Eddon had “Thunder” back in the game with Matt Yates leading the way with 12 of the team’s opening 13 points. This gave other players confidence on offence, with Jason Moore and Jack Thomas combining for 11 of the teams next 13 points, stunning “Panthers”, and giving their team a 26-24 lead at the end of the first period of play.

“Panthers” showed exceptional quality in shot selection, and ball movement, at the start of the second quarter connecting with six shots from the behind the arc. It was the combined efforts of Linas Bajorunas, Luke Lewis and Yates who were getting to the basket for “Thunder”, and frequently taking the contact along the way, and despite not registering too high on the score sheet, Thunder's powerful centre Kamesi Fawehinmi was using his athleticism at both ends to cause Panthers some real problems.

“Thunder” looked to be going into the half time break leading by eight points, until three turnovers in the last minute handed Panthers an 8-0 run to tie everything up at 50 all.

From “Thunder’s” point of view it was crucial to keep the game within reach as the 'top of the table', “Panthers” had looked surprisingly nervy at times in the first half, but this went straight over the heads of the “Thunder” player’s. A series of errors allowed “Panthers” to open up an 11 point lead on the back of three more three point shots. To their credit, “Thunder” dug in and calmed the storm but still trailed 64-75 going into the final quarter.

When “Panthers” opened up the fourth quarter with monster “three” everyone could have been forgiven for thinking the 14 point deficit was just too much for the Thunder players to come back from. Some heavy handed defence from skipper Yates, seemed to inspire Luke Lewis and he grabbed the game by the scruff of the neck with three back-to-back lay ups on the break. Then Fawehinmi found his scoring touch, and suddenly the scores were tied at 80 all with two minutes to go on the clock.

Excellent rebounding by “Thunder” small forwards Lewis Mooney and Jack Thomas were crucial as they set Yates away on a couple of break away scores, but it was the defensive effort by all the players that kept Panthers to just 2 points in the final six minutes. Trailing 84-82 “Panthers” had just two seconds on the clock when they ran an out of bounds play, but a determined Thunder team was not going to give up the win. As the game ending buzzer sounded the final shot hit the top of the backboard, and a large crowd cheered in celebration of the David and Goliath win.

“Thunder” coach Rob Eddon was ecstatic after the game paying tribute to his whole team who just a week earlier had suffered the heart-breaking defeat in Newcastle. In the victory over one of the best junior teams in the country the mercurial Yates scored 34 points while Bajorunas and Lewis supported well with 17 and 11 points respectively but this was a true team win.

Junior Women suffer big loss against “Warriors”

Junior Women’s Midlands South-West Conference

Herts “Warriors”	85 -48	Northants “Lightning”
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The Northants junior women suffered a heavy defeat at the hands of Herts “Warriors” but still stayed in contention for an end of season Play Off place.

The game was as good as over by half time by which time “Warriors” had established a game winning 46-16 lead. “Lightning” were far more competitive in the second half which they only lost 32-39 but there was never ever a realistic chance that they would close the gap.

Cadet Men are ‘chewed up’ by “Sharks”

Cadet Men’s Premier Division North

Sheffield “Junior Sharks”	86 – 40	Northants “Thunder”
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A short time after the end of this Premier Division North fixture the Northants statistician Jo Paul asked one of the game officials if holding, pushing and shoulder charging the ball handler was legal. When the answer came back in the negative Jo asked why these fouls hadn’t been called in the game. The response was” My co-official and I agreed before the game that we would let things go in the middle of the court but call all the fouls close to the basket.”

The two referees certainly stuck to this philosophy with the “Thunder” ‘big’ men Ali Bain, George Calvey and Karan Virdee being called for more fouls than the entire Sheffield team. In fact the game foul count of 26 against “Thunder” and 11 against “Sharks” was all the more surprising because “Sharks” played a pressure defence throughout the game while “Thunder” sat in a zone.

The final score rather flattered the home side who took the final quarter 30-5. Until that time “Thunder” had battled hard against incredible defensive pressure and were trailing 56-35 but then the loss of their three tallest players with five fouls proved too much.

Coach John Collins was proud that his players stayed positive to end no more so than Josh Round who scored 17 points while George Calvey contributed 10 points before fouling out.

Cadette Women's Midland, South-West Conference

“Bears” no match for the party girls

Northants “Lightning Too”

81 -24

Bromsgrove “Bears”

A few hours after helping their coach to celebrate her birthday the Northants cadette women stepped out on court and totally demolished a Bromsgrove “Bears” team. The win extends their unbeaten run to nine games and keeps them in a solid third place in the Conference table a position which would earn them a Play Off spot.

The game was incredibly one sided with “Bears” unable to score in double figures in any of the four periods of play. Meanwhile “Lightning Too” put on a party performance scoring for fun for most of the game.

In the 50 + points romp Hannah Nolan took a break from cake eating to score a personal high of 31 points while Steph Ogden swapped dancing for scoring with 18 points and Tara Hings joined in the celebrations with 11 points.

“Warriors” pressure too much for Under 15 Girls

Herts “Warriors”

84 – 69

Northants “Lightning”

The pressure defence of the Herts “Warriors” teams is legend so the Northants under 15 girls travelled to Queens Schools, Bushey expecting pressure and they got it. Despite their pre-game preparation “Lightning” were guilty of coughing up the ball on too many occasions during the first quarter and “Warriors” raced out to a 22-10 first quarter lead.

This lead was extended by three points in the second quarter but by now “Lightning” were showing they could be competitive with the team that currently lies second in the Midlands South-West Conference.

Coach Karen Goodrich set her team the target of not losing the second half and they responded well tying the last two quarters 36 all.

In the 15 point defeat which represented a massive improvement on the 40 plus loss earlier in the season; Charlotte Berridge led her team's scoring with 18 points with good support coming from Caitlin Stewart with 15. The other major points scorers were Ruchae Walton, Sarah Round and Lauren Milne while Milne and Walton rebounded superbly

Weekend of mixed fortunes for Under 15 Boys

Under 15 Boys Midlands Conference

NEBC “Titans”

81 -77

Northants “Thunder”

The NEBC “Titans earned local bragging rights with this exciting four point win over local rivals Northants “Thunder” in a Midlands Conference game at Weavers Sports Centre, Wellingborough.

From the outset it was clear that there was going to be no repeat of the 30 point blowout “Thunder” had inflicted on “Titans” earlier in the season. The two teams exchanged scores throughout the first period of play and “Titans” showed what they were made of with a three point buzzer beater to take a 23-18 lead at the end of the period.

In the second quarter Coach Rob Crump switched to his zone press in the hope that he could disrupt the “Titans” ball handlers meanwhile “Titans” were employing a tenacious man-to-man pressure defence which forced a number of “Thunder” turn-overs. Thanks to some good work from Ed Hall, “Thunder” took the period 18-11 to establish a 36-34 and an enthusiastic crowd looked forward to the second half.

“Thunder” persisted with their zone press at the start of the third quarter but on a number of occasions were guilty of not covering their back court leading to easy “Titans” scores. They were also guilty of poor boxing out as the “Titans” big players began to score with put backs. In a high scoring period “Titans” edged the quarter 24-20 to take a narrow 58-56 advantage going into the final period of play.

The final quarter saw “Thunder” switch to a man-to-man defence but “Titans” seemed to be playing with more confidence and they kept their noses in front despite the best efforts of the Northants players. By now “Thunder” were struggling to execute their half court offence and as the game finished in a plethora of free throws “Titans” were able to take the quarter 23-21 to win the game 81-77 to the delight of their players.

The standing ovation both teams received at the end of the game was testament to a fine game played in excellent spirit.

In the four point defeat Ed Hall top scored for “Thunder” with 21 points while guards Carlo Nieva and Ollie Thomas both scored 11 points

Northants “Thunder” 65 – 51 Birmingham “Bulls”

After their disappointing loss against “Titans” the previous day “Thunder” were back on court at the Basketball Centre to take on Birmingham “Bulls” the second City of Birmingham team. “Thunder” were only able to suit up eight players but they were able to take control of the game blasting into a 9-2 run with 7 points coming from an energetic Will Grosvenor. “Bulls” made a determined effort to reduce the lead and successfully converted a number of second chance shots, but “Thunder’s” lead was restored by Dan Thacker who scored 6 consecutive points to give his team a 21-10 lead after the first quarter.

“Thunder” employed a variety of defences to unsettle the Birmingham side in the second period of play and this resulted in a 12-3 run which extended their lead to 39-21 with scores coming from Jacob Killeya, Carlos Nieva and Grosvenor. Again, “Bulls” produced a mini revival but “Thunder” still led 40-26 at half time.

The third quarter was a low scoring affair, “Thunder” managing just nine points; eight of them coming in the first five minutes of the period. After a Birmingham time out the visitors managed a 7-zero charge but an Ollie Thomas free throw saw “Thunder” leading 49-33 going into the final ten minutes of play.

The final quarter saw “Thunder” using zone pressing tactics to put pressure on the “Bulls” ball handlers and this resulted in “Thunder” increasing their lead to 62-42. “Bulls” finished the contest with a flurry of three-point shots which reduced the final deficit but this was not enough to put the “Thunder” lead under any real pressure as they ran out winners by 65 points to 51 with Will Grosvenor leading the scoring with 17 points. Good support came from Killeya and Nieva who scored 15 points apiece while Thacker and Thomas both made important points contributions.

No joy for Under 14 Boys in Derby

Under 14 Boys Midlands Conference

Derby “Trailblazers” 74 – 34 Northants “Thunder”

“Thunder” started this game very slowly and were guilty of throwing the ball away on several occasions. It was not until half way through the first quarter they managed to put points on the board but were dominated by “Trailblazers” in every area of the game. A first quarter score of 24-6 to the home team reflected the “Thunder” shortcomings. The second period continued in the same fashion with the teams finishing 44-12 at half time. The second half proved no better with only David Nieva providing any credible offensive threat. Thunder did manage to win the final period 13-9 but the final score of 74-34 gives the team plenty to think about. In the 40 point defeat David Nieva managed 20 points for Thunder with Ayo Oluyede scoring five.

Routine win for Under 14 Girls

Under 14 Girls Midland South West Conference

Northants “Lightning” 87 - 41 NASSA

This 40+ points win over the Newham All Star Sports Academy cemented the Northants under 14 girls third place position in the Conference table. Against a game London side “Lightning” showed their class in the first period of play jumping out to a 20-7 lead. The team’s intensity decreased in the second quarter as Coach Karen Goodrich began to rotate her players but they still took the period 20-13 to lead 40-20 at half time.

Any chance of a NASSA revival were swept away by a ruthless “Lightning” defensive effort in the third period which they took 32-9 to take the final result beyond doubt. With the game won Goodrich was able to give all her less experienced players ample court time during the final stanza and they rewarded her by taking the period 15-12 and the game 87-41.

In the overwhelming win a number of “Lightning” players posted impressive statistics with Ruchae Walton, Abbie Turner and Abi Hobbs all recording double figure rebounds. Walton completed her usual double-double with 17 points well supported by Charlotte Price and Caitlin Stewart with 14 and 13 points respectively.

Big loss for Under 13 Boys

Under 13 Boys Midlands Conference Herts "Warriors" 78 – 41 Northants "Thunder"

With three teams competing for the remaining two playoff spots, the game between "Thunder" and "Warriors" was an important one for both teams. Only one point separated the two teams in the first period which the home side edged 14-13, but the second period was a very different story. "Thunder" paid a heavy price for poor pre-match preparations and a lack of commitment to the task in hand. A succession of missed shots and turnovers handed the Warriors 18-0 and 11-0 runs, whilst Thunder could only manage one basket in open play and two free throws. "Warriors" took the period 31-4 to open up a 45-17 half time lead and leaving "thunder" with the proverbial mountain to climb.

After a stern talking to at half time, "Thunder" were a bit more competitive for the remainder of the game, but the damage had been done. Laurence Williams turned in another solid performance scoring 21 points and Coach Round was particularly impressed with the level of effort displayed by George Lethbridge.

The 78-41 loss means that Thunder have some must-win games coming up if they are to make the playoffs.

THIS WEEKEND'S ACTION

Friday 22nd February

6-30pm Under 15 Girls versus Nottingham "Wildcats"

Saturday 23rd February

11-30am Under 14 Boys versus Milton Keynes "Lions"
Cadette Women versus Herts "Warriors"
1-30pm Junior Women versus Sporting Club Albion
Junior Men versus Stockport "Spartans"
3-30pm Under 15 Girls versus Bristol "Storm"
5-30pm Senior Men versus Birmingham "Mets II"

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

Spectators are welcome and admission is **FREE**

Other games on Saturday:

Cadet Boys travel to NEBC "Titans"
Under 15 Boys travel to Bromsgrove "Bears"
Under 14 Girls travel to Brentwood "Fire"
Under 13 Boys travel to Bracknell