

NORTHANTS BASKETBALL CLUB

MEDIA RELEASE

Last weekend the Northants Basketball Club were involved in no less than eight games and to the credit of all the players and coaches involved all eight games resulted in victories for the Club

“Thunder” go top of the pile after two close wins

After a narrow victory over top-of-the-table Rossendale “Raptors” followed the next day by a close win over Sheffield “Sabres”, the Northants “Thunder” senior men sit proudly on top of the North Conference of Division 3

Men’s Division Three North Conference

Northants “Thunder”	77 – 71	Rossendale “Raptors”
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With both teams knowing how important this top-of-the-table clash was likely to be, “Thunder” made the better start to the game by opening up a 15-6 lead after five minutes of play. This forced a “Raptors” time-out and the team responded well to Coach Masser's words and thanks to some excellent shooting from guards Graham and Gayle, led 19-17 at the end of the first period of play. For “Thunder”, Leome Francis was showing what a threat he was close to basket with 8 points.

In the second quarter “Thunder” were able to spread the offensive load with five players getting on the score sheet, but rather worryingly “Raptors” were beginning to dominate proceedings ‘in the paint’. The visitors were also showing a great deal of patience on offence and were able to set up open shots for Gayle and Porter, who hit three, three pointers and 15pts between them. “Raptors” went into the break with a 43-36 lead, and Northants knew they had a real game on their hands.

After the half time break, Northants showed exactly why they have toppled Division 1 and 2 teams this season. They kept “Raptors” to just 7pts in the quarter, and kept them scoreless for the final six minutes. “Thunder's” defence constricted and frustrated the “Raptors” so much that signs of dissent could be seen from some of their players. Meanwhile, Jonny Yates, Jason Tucker and Francis were hurting “Raptors” from all areas of the floor. With the “Raptors” 'biggs' falling asleep, Northants won the quarter 24-7 to open up a 10 point lead at 60-50 going into the final stanza.

In that third quarter “Thunder” had put in a major physical effort and this certainly showed as the final quarter got underway. “Raptors” picked up a number of easy scores, whilst Thunder looked tired in their shooting, taking shots out of rhythm. By now “Raptors” were on fire with new signing Rangeley connecting from ‘deep’ as Rossendale shot themselves into a 70-65 lead with just two minutes of the game remaining.

The Northants players needed to dig deep and they did just that. Tucker did a great job by ‘locking up’ the “Raptors” guards Houghton and Gayle, while Leon Henry and Yates hit two big treys and Francis converted eight of ten attempts from the ‘charity stripe’. “Raptors” called a couple of time-outs and ran offences to get the lead back, but “Thunder's” determined defence forced them into tough shots. When these shots missed “Raptors” were forced to foul and Francis continued to clinically score from the resulting free throws. “Raptors” took the period 21-17 but it wasn't enough to win the game and “Thunder” were able to celebrate a 77-71 win despite losing three of the four periods of play.

For “Thunder”, Leome Francis was virtually unstoppable close to basket and he top scored with 28 points. Leon Henry contributed 15 points and Jason Tucker 14 while Jonny Yates' 9 points all came from beyond the arc and Richard Higgins had numerous rebounds to go with his 7 points.

The post game comment of delighted coaches, Grahame Yates and Rob Eddon, was succinct and to the point, “Fantastic game, Fantastic effort. Fantastic performance.”

Sheffield “Sabres”

75 – 83

Northants “Thunder”

After their tremendous comeback win against Rossendale the previous evening “Thunder” travelled to Sheffield “Sabres” knowing a win would move them to the top of the North Conference of Division 3. The major concern of the team’s coaching staff was that the team was not still celebrating the fantastic accomplishments of the previous day. They also felt it was important that the tempo of the game against “Sabres” was controlled so that they didn't run out of steam too quickly.

The first quarter turned out to be a very close affair, with the lead changing hands no less than ten times. “Thunder” just edged the period 23-18 thanks to two big ‘threes’ from Jason Tucker and the forceful play of Leome Francis which saw him hitting 10 personal points.

“Sabres” did well to drag themselves back into the contest and thanks to some poor decision making by “Thunder” at both ends of the floor, and the home side had drawn level midway through the second quarter. “Thunder” took a time out to talk things over and this led to a 10-2 run to re- open up their eight point lead. “Sabres” refused to go away and pulled the deficit back to just 2pts with 90 seconds left to halftime at which stage the “Thunder” guards came to life with Leon Henry scoring after penetrating to the basket, and Sam Round connecting sweetly from deep, from a Jonny Yates penetration and dish.

“Thunder” have a reputation of being deadly after halftime breaks. Whilst this post half time period didn't match the beauty of the previous day, it certainly matched it for intensity and determination. “Thunder” won the quarter 27-21 to open up a 13pt lead and give the team a little bit of breathing space. Tucker was on another level from the perimeter scoring at will, and contributing 11pts, whilst the whole team did a fantastic job of switching on screens, closing down Sabres shooters and taking the Sheffield team out of their comfort zone. Sheffield's hearts sank a little further when both of their 'biggs' got into foul trouble and were taken out of the game.

“Thunder” had expended a great deal of energy in that third quarter and the team coaches emphasised how important it was to control the game clock and work for good looks at the basket. Everything was going to plan until the home team went on an 11-2 run over a period of two minutes. This meant that “Thunder” now held a narrow 76-72 lead with just over two minutes of the contest remaining and knowing the ‘finishing line’ was close. The growing tension was reduced when Leon Henry got a three from a Tucker hand off, followed by a Jacob Holt put-back and now the game was as good as over. The two teams exchanged scores with “Thunder” running out winners by 83 points to 75; a win which moved them to the top of the table with just five regular season games to go.

Once again the “Thunder” coaches were full of praise for their players who had produced a mature, disciplined and determined performance.

In the eight point win Leome Francis had another dominant game with 26 points while excellent support came from Jason Tucker with 20 points which included five three-pointers, Leon Henry with 13 points and Jacob Holt with 11.

Short-handed Junior Men win on the road

Junior Men’s Premier Division North

Cheshire “Panthers”

66 - 103

Northants “Thunder”

After unproductive trips north on the two previous weekends the Northants junior men made a switch from the M.1. to the M.6. for the trip to Cheshire to take on bottom of the table “Panthers”. A plethora of injuries had reduced the “Thunder” squad to just six players but stand-in coach Stacey Shakespeare made sure her charges were in optimistic mood. Against weaker opposition than in previous weeks “Thunder” were able to dominate proceedings winning all four periods of play to run out comfortable winners by 103 points to 66.

Karan Virdee dominated the rebounding department launching numerous fast breaks which saw Linas Bajournas score 35 points while Sam Round totalled an amazing 51 points including no less than eight, three-pointers. Coach Shakespeare was also impressed with the efforts of Josh Round who scored 10 points and the work effort of Luke Joines and David Radford.

Cadette Women overwhelm “Demons”

Under 16 Girls Midlands South – West Conference

Northants “Lightning” 83 – 26 Wiltshire “Demons”

For the second week running the Northants under 16 girls team were involved in another meaningless game against an enthusiastic but inexperienced Wiltshire “Demons” team. Coach Karen Goodrich was absolutely delighted that once again all twelve of her players got onto the score sheet but she bemoaned the fact that her players hadn’t been really challenged. She commented, “My players work hard in practice and their attendance record is excellent but the motivation to work hard decreases because they know we win most of our games too easily.”

Against “Demons”, “Lightning” kept their opponents below double figures in all four periods of play whilst scoring freely themselves and playing very little of the pressure defence they prefer.

All twelve “Lightning” players contributed to the win with Lauren Milne recording a double-double while Ruchae Walton led all scorers with 28 personal points.

Cadet Boys maintain unbeaten record

Under 16 Boys Midlands Conference

Coventry “Trojans” 50 – 64 Northants “Thunder”

Following this 14 point win over Coventry “Trojans”, the Northants “Thunder” cadet men sit proudly on top of the Midlands Conference boasting a record of Won 14, Lost 0.

“Thunder” made the short journey to Coventry last Saturday in the knowledge that when the two teams met earlier in the season the game was a close encounter with “Thunder” edging the contest by just eight points. A tough game was expected and so it proved and the “Thunder” victory was based on both ability and determination.

“Trojans” opened the game with a zone defence, a tactic they maintained for most of the game and there was little difference between the two teams in the first quarter but 10 points from Jacob Round consisting of two three pointers kept “Thunder” within reach. The Northants boys were struggling with the size of the “Trojans” players who dominated the boards and it was the home side that held the upper hand at the end of the quarter leading 17-15.

Due to the numerous mismatches, “Thunder” Coach Rob Crump switched his team to a zone defence. His team was inspired by an influential performance from Brendan Ross who battled hard against the opposition big men to secure defensive rebounds and on two occasions ran the length of the court to score in transition. “Thunder” were given a boost, when “Trojans” displayed some disciplinary problems when their point guard committed his third foul which was immediately followed by a technical foul for unsporting behaviour. In response “Thunder” sparked into 13-2 run to conclude the quarter, with scores from Rhys Hill, Carlo Nieva and Jacob Killeya giving “Thunder” a 34-24 half time lead.

“Thunder” needed to produce a strong performance at the start of the second half to combat any “Trojans” comeback. The home side refused to come out of their zone defence but now were looking to ‘trap’ on the perimeter. “Thunder” calmly dealt with this pressure and when Carlo Nieva stroked home a 3 point shot, the “Thunder” lead had been extended to 13 points. “Trojans” responded with three points of their own but at the end of the quarter “Thunder” were still leading 49-39.

If the "Lightning" defence had been miserly in the first quarter it was even tighter in the second as they restricted "Hornets" to just 5 points. Meanwhile on offence "Lightning" were showing more discipline and patience as they took the period 18-5 the highlight being the first three pointer in a league game for Lucy Amena.

Leading 36-14 at half time the "Lightning" players were guilty of easing off at the start of the third quarter as the home side opened with a 6-2 run. Coach Darjius Maldutis took a time out and insisted that his team raised their efforts to the levels of the first half. His payers responded well and "Lightning" went on a 15-2 run including a three-pointer from Holly Winterburn. "Lightning" took the quarter 23-13 and at 59-27 the game was as good as over as a contest.

To their credit "Hornets" came out for the final quarter in determined mood, employing a double teaming defence which forced a number of "Lightning" turn-overs. "Hornets" actually won the period 16-10 to reduce "Lightning's" winning margin to 26 points with their scoring led by Winterburn with 15 points, she also pulled down 10 rebounds. Excellent support came from Bahira Barakat, Amena and Georgia Collins with 14, 13 and 12 points respectively but the win had been based on excellent team defence and unselfish play which led to all the players scoring.

THIS WEEKEND'S ACTION

Saturday 8th February

9-30am to 11am	Under 12 Practice
10am to 11am	Junior "Ballers"
11.30am	Under 13 Boys versus Leicester "Sparks"
	Under 14 Girls versus Southend "Swifts"
1.30pm	Cadet Men versus Worcester "Wolves"
	Junior Women versus Sporting Club Albion
3.30pm	Junior Men versus Leeds "Carnegie"

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

Cadette Women travel to Exeter "Eagles"
Senior Men travel to Tees Valley II

Sunday 9th February

Under 13 Boys travel to NEBC "Titans"
Under 14 Boys travel to Derby "Trailblazers"
Under 15 Boys travel to Shropshire "Warriors"