

NORTHANTS BASKETBALL CLUB

PRESS RELEASE

Play Off News

Under 15 Boys Play Off 1st Round

**Northants “Thunder” 88 – 50 Newham All Star Sports Academy
(NASSA)**

Play Off games are always strange affairs as teams prepare to play a team from another Conference not quite knowing what to expect. Maybe this was the reason why the Northants Under 15 Boys were more nervous than usual before their game against the Newham All Star Sports Academy.

As it turned out their nervousness was unfounded because after winning the tip-off they raced to 12-zero lead. Shekina Ntumba was playing with a great deal of passion despite conceding three inches to his opposite number the Thunder centre just wouldn't let his opponent receive the ball. NASSA became frustrated as the intensity of Thunder's defence forced a number of turn-overs leading to easy scores and with Jacob Round his usual inspirational self Thunder were able to establish 30-12 lead after the first period of play.

Rocked by the first quarter deficit NASSA made a massive effort to get back into the game in the second quarter but their efforts came at a cost with a number of their players getting into early foul trouble. In a low scoring quarter edged 15-9 by Thunder, Jared Ryan and Ed Taylan both made important contributions.

Leading 45-21 at half time, Thunder had to be careful of a NASSA revival in the third quarter but in the event they had nothing to fear as they comfortably won the period by 32 points to 11 thanks once more to some excellent defence. NASSA had no answer to the onslaught as Ed Wallhead chipped in with half a dozen points despite still nursing an ankle injury.

With the game over as contest at 77-32 Thunder coach Grahame Yates was able to give all his players plenty of court time in the fourth quarter. To their credit the London team continued to battle hard and actually took the final period 18-11 but it was a case of far too little far too late as Thunder ran out comfortable winners by 38 points. Round led his team's scoring with 44 points with Taylan contributing 9 points.

The team can now look forward to a 2nd Round game against the hard nosed *Cheshire “Wire”* outfit. That game will be played this Saturday at the Basketball Centre

Conference News

Junior Women complete their Conference programme with a double

Junior Women's Midland South West Conference

Gloster “Jets” 24 – 61 Northants “Lightning”

Gloster “Jets” 37 – 74 Northants “Lightning”

The Northants junior women completed their Conference programme with a brace of wins against Gloster Jets. As with Wiltshire Demons the Northants club had agreed to play back-to-back games in order to save travel time.

Lightning comfortably won both games by 37 points thanks to some hard nosed defence which kept Jets below 40 points in both games. The Lightning scoring was led by under 16 player Ruchae Walton well supported by the ever reliable Stephanie Ogden while Riona Blessyn and Caitlin Stewart made important points contributions but all nine players made significant contributions to the team's defensive efforts.

The team now faces a three week wait before the Play Offs start for reasons best known to the sports governing body.

Cadet Men need a bit of ‘Junk’ to see off “Warriors”

Under 16 Boys Midland Conference

Leicester “Warriors”

52 -54

Northants “Thunder”

The Northants Cadet Boys travelled to Leicester to take on Warriors having already secured second place in the Midlands Conference but knowing that a win would give them home advantage in the 1st Round of the Play Offs. The game was a re-arranged fixture after the first contest had been abandoned when Thunder’s forward Reece Zubal had sustained a serious knee injury. Under the league rules only players who were on the original score sheet could participate so the Northants boys were without Zubal and Solomon Day-Adley who also suffered a knee injury just after Christmas.

Thunder made the worst possible start showing little energy or aggression while Warriors looked well up for the contest and were shooting well from the perimeter. Midway through the first quarter the home side had jumped out to a 15-3 lead and an embarrassing loss looked to be on the cards for Thunder. Coach John Collins called a time out and appealed to his players’ pride and they responded well keeping Warriors scoreless for the rest of the period while scoring 9 points themselves.

For the second quarter Collins switched his team’s defence to man to man with David Nieva and Ayo Oluyede allocated the job of marking the Warriors’ danger men, guard Birchenhaugh and left handed centre Wardle. The two teams exchanged scores through the period which Thunder just edged 14-12 to reduced the deficit to 23-27 at half time.

The third period of play proved to be decisive for the Northants team with Nieva and Oluyede combining some excellent offensive skills with their defensive duties. Midway through the period Thunder took the lead for the first time and went on to win the quarter 16-6 to establish a 39-33 advantage.

It was a determined Warriors team that came out for the final quarter and immediately the gap was closed with Wardle scoring freely against the tiring Oluyede. Collins was worried that his team’s zone defence hadn’t been very effective so he asked his team to play a combination defence of a two man to man backed up by a three man zone known affectionately by many coaches as a ‘junk defence’. Initially this ploy was successful but then Birchenhaugh launched a barrage of successful three point shots with Warriors fouling immediately to send Thunder to the free throw line. The mounting tension was increased when Thunder contrived to miss six free throws and then wasting possession, but Julian Abeam scored two vital baskets as the Northants boys held on for the 54-52 win that earns them home advantage in the 1st Round of the Play Offs.

In the two point victory Nieva and Oluyede top scored for Thunder with 17 and 16 points respectively while good support came from Abeam with 12 points

Below par Under 14 Girls complete their Conference season unbeaten

Under 14 Girls Midlands Conference

Northants “Lightning”

60 – 40

Bucks “Hornets”

A lacklustre performance from the Northants under 14 team saw the team complete an undefeated Conference season with a played 15 won 15 record. Overall national positions will now be decided on points difference with Lightning only ‘topped’ by Manchester Mystics. They will now face the team placed 15th in the country in the 1st Round of the Play Offs on the weekend of 11th and 12th April.

Against second placed Bucks Hornets, Lightning made a slow start and only led 10-7 after the first period of play. The Hornets coach had targeted the prolific scoring Holly Winterburn for special attention often assigning two players to mark the Northants guard. The legality of this tactic is questionable but it hardly conforms to the rules that only man-to-man defence should be used.

Stand in coach Karen Goodrich was able to get a more productive performance from her players in the second quarter and with Lucy Amena taking over ball handling duties so freeing up Winterburn, Lightning took the period 27-9 to take a 37-16 lead into half time.

Hornets edged the third quarter 14-8 to reduce the deficit but Lightning won the final period 15-10 to run out winners by 60 points to 40

Play Off Roll Call of Honour

Under 14 Boys
Under 15 Boys (Already through to the 2nd Round)
Under 16 Boys
Under 14 Girls
Under 16 Girls
Under 18 Girls

Well done to the players, coaches, assistant coaches and managers of these six teams. It is worth noting that these six teams have only lost six Conference games between them.

Junior Ballers & Ballers Academy Presentations

Over 50 boys and girls aged 4 to 12 celebrated the end of their season last Saturday with every member of the Junior Ballers and Ballers Academy receiving a certificate and an Easter egg.

The Programme directed by Karen Goodrich and coached by Natasha Wesley and Ben Knight could not have run as efficiently as it did without the help of Young Leaders from the Club so massive thanks go to Lucy Amena, Zoe Milward, Holly Winterburn, Caitlin Stewart, Zak Kitchen, Ainsley Reynolds, Ed Taylan, Will Charter and Joshua Blase for giving up their Saturday mornings to help. These all received a Goodie Bag from Coach Goodrich as a "Thank You".

The various award winners were:

Junior Ballers

Henry Eason and Athena Thomson

Under 10's Ballers Academy Section

George Berry and Max Elms

Under 12's Ballers Academy Section

Cameron Leighton and Dina Kosnikovska

THIS WEEKEND'S ACTIVITIES

Saturday 21st March

11-45 am

Under 15 Boys versus Cheshire "Wire"
2nd Round Play Off game

Sunday 22nd March

11-45 am

Cadet Boys versus Doncaster Danum "Eagles"

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

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