



MVL NATIONAL VOLLEYBALL LEAGUE
MATCH REPORTS

Men's 1

Saturday 20th October 2012

London Docklands vs Birmingham

Result: 25-8 25-13 25-20 (3-0)

London Docklands moved up to second place in National League Division 1 after a convincing 3-0 victory over Birmingham. The West Midlands side played in the Super8s last season but only survived one year in the top flight. Since then they have lost a significant number of players and are still looking for their first win of the new season after four matches.

Docklands gifted Birmingham the first two points but then stamped their authority on the game to rush into an 8-2 lead. Dominant blocking by Slawek Omlyski and Platon Vogiatzoglou left Birmingham nowhere left to go and the pressure forced more and more errors from the visitors. Birmingham failed to win another service point in the rest of the set as Docklands cruised to a 25-8 first set win.

Raul Sanchez Galan came on to make his Docklands' debut at the start of set two and his range and array of shots caused Birmingham problems from the beginning. Docklands captain Mark Baechli maintained the service pressure on a fragile Birmingham passing unit and his run of seven serves at the start of the set helped his side open up a 7-0 lead. Birmingham did eventually register on the scoreboard but the damage was already done. Omlyski got himself in on the serving act with three aces in a row to seal a 25-13 second set win.

Birmingham made more of a fight of it in set three and forced Docklands to work harder for their victory. The visitors held on until 20-20 but a run of four serves by Baechli snuffed out any hope Birmingham had. Docklands took the final set 25-20.

Docklands coach Andy Hopper said afterwards, "That was a good solid performance by the whole squad. In these sorts of matches it's key that you maintain your own level and we did that throughout today. We need to do the same next weekend and keep taking it one game at a time."

With Wessex BU also enjoying a 3-0 victory over Tendring, Docklands were able to leapfrog Tendring into second place. Docklands' next fixture is away to Nottingham who's only victory so far this season was against Birmingham.

Saturday 17th November 2012

London Docklands vs Tendring

Result: 25-20, 25-16, 25-20 (3-0)

London Docklands moved to the top of National League Division 1 after a solid 3-0 victory over Tendring. Docklands' time at the summit of the league will only last one week with Wessex BU resuming their position at the top regardless of their result against Lynx 2 next weekend. However, it does guarantee that when Wessex visit Bacon's College on 8th December, we will see a tasty clash between the top two teams in the league.

With Docklands old boys Alex Porter and Neil Masters on the opposite side of the net the match was always going to have that extra edge and both sides knew the importance of the result. It was Docklands who settled down first with some impressive blocking by the whole team and stand-out displays from Platon Vogiatzoglou and Slawek Omlyski. Tendring looked nervous and numerous errors helped Docklands build a formidable 16-6 lead. A combination of Docklands taking their foot off the gas and Tendring finding more of a rhythm saw the visitors close back to within two points at 17-15. However, Docklands recovered their composure and a Nicolò d'Elia run of serves helped re-establish his side's advantage. Blocks by Mark Baechli and Vogiatzoglou kept the pressure on Tendring's hitters and Docklands took the set 25-20.

Two quick fire points off Baechli's serve gave Docklands a flying start to the second set and Tendring were chasing the game from the outset. Spaniard Raul Sanchez Galan's variety of serves caused problems on each of his service rotations and helped provide Docklands with a comfortable lead. The set ended on a controversial point which took the referees two minutes to decide upon. It was eventually awarded to Docklands but the set had already been beyond Tendring as Docklands secured it 25-16.

Tendring coach Masters tried to change the game with a new formation in set three. Porter was switched to the outside, Stuart Dove back to his favoured opposite position and Masters moved himself into an unorthodox middle blocking role. His side gained some success in their new set-up and were still in touch 8-7 down at the first technical time-out. But a run of tricky Baechli serves broke the deadlock and Docklands were suddenly 13-8 up. Porter then used all his experience to drag his team back into the set with some probing serves. Tendring were back to within a point until another Sanchez Galan run gave Docklands some breathing space. In the end, the 25-20 score line in set three slightly flattered Docklands but overall they richly deserved the 3-0 victory it brought.

Docklands coach Andy Hopper said afterwards, "Considering the pressure and importance of the game we played some of our most consistent volleyball of the season today. This was just the first part of our trilogy of big matches before Christmas and we want to carry on this good run for the rest of the year".

Docklands return to the KO cup in two weeks time with an interesting tie against old foes Polonia. The match will provide the Division 1 side with a good test against Super8 opposition before the top of the table clash with Wessex one week later.

Docklands MVP: Raul Sanchez Galan

Tendring MVP: Jack Bruce

Saturday 24th November 2012

Wessex BU vs London Lynx 2

Result: 25-16 25-13 25-14 (3-0)

Wessex Men returned to league action at Oakmead LeAF on Saturday hosting a visit from London Lynx 2. On a bleak afternoon more suited for indoor sport, a large crowd had already seen the Wessex Ladies secure a 3 – 0 win so the pressure was on the men to do likewise. Team consisted of Dan Hunter (c), Ben Pipes, Kirk Pitman, Carl Butcher, Matt Hunter, Tom Ridge, Andy Clayton, Olly Batt, Lewie Lett, Aaron Walrond, Ryan Palmer and Alex Clare.

Unbeaten Wessex fielded a strong starting six, signaling their intent from the start with some aggressive attacking from New Zealand international Kirk Pitman. With a comfortable lead, coach Vangelis took the opportunity to bring on Alex Clare along with Olly Batt and Matt Hunter. A strong run of serves from GB's Dan Hunter saw Wessex take the set 25 – 16.

The second set followed a similar pattern, with the London coach receiving a yellow card for challenging one too many decisions. Confident blocking at the net from GB captain Ben Pipes, Andy Clayton and Matt Hunter with some good pick ups from Libero Ryan Palmer, ensured the visitors only accumulated 13 points to make it 2 – 0.

Wessex rested Tom Ridge from the third set as he says farewell to embark on his European adventures enabling Aaron Walrond to contribute to a third set win 25 – 14. A comfortable 3 – 0 win sees Wessex remain unbeaten and return to the top of the league with a perfect 6 from 6. MVP's were awarded to Dan Hunter (Wessex BU) and Donnique Mabena (London Lynx 2).

Saturday 8th December 2012

London Docklands vs Wessex BU

Result: 25-20 20-25 25-13 25-19 (3-1)

London Docklands produced probably their best performance in over three years to inflict a first defeat of the season on high-flying Wessex BU. This was the first time the two sides had met in almost ten years and Docklands had a slight lead 6-5 in the series. Only two survivors from the last fixture were involved in the latest installment; Docklands' coaches Andy Hopper and Danny Primus. Following their promotion from Division 2 last season, Wessex have gained the services of Great Britain stars Ben Pipes and Dan Hunter. With the support of some good young home-grown talent and new Kiwi signing Kirk Pitman, the team from Bournemouth had vanquished all before them up until Saturday. This included a cup victory over Super8 team SGTV Solent on Wednesday. However, other than that fixture, Evangelos Koutouleas' side had not really been challenged so far this season. That all changed at Bacon's College.

Docklands began confidently with a block by Marc Schaeperstoens and an ace by Mark Baechli giving them the perfect start. But Wessex pegged back the home side as both teams found their rhythm to provide the crowd with some high octane volleyball of the highest quality. A casual observer would have assumed it was a match from the Super 8s as several dramatic rallies entertained the spectators. It was Docklands who held a slender advantage at the second technical time-out, 16-14. Docklands' sideout game was strong and with the help of a short run of Baechli serves, Koutouleas was forced to call his first time-out, 16-19 down. Another Baechli ace increased Docklands' cushion and they held on and took the first set 25-20.

Docklands enjoyed the better of the opening exchanges of the second set and led 10-7. But service pressure from Andrew Clayton and a sequence of Docklands' errors helped switch the momentum back Wessex's way. Koutouleas introduced left handed Miguel Espinoza at 14-15 down which enabled Pipes to return to setting duties. Docklands took a while to adjust to Wessex's new formation and when Espinoza returned to the bench his side were 23-18 up and went on to tie the match with a 25-20 second set win.

Wessex carried forward their momentum into set three to lead 4-0 - some clever short serving from Pitman applied subtle pressure to Docklands' passing unit. Wessex continued to dictate proceedings and the triumvirate of Pipes-Hunter-Pitman were dominating Docklands at the net. Hopper brought in Nicolò d'Elia and after a slow start he began to control play with his set distribution keeping the Wessex block guessing. At one stage Wessex were 17-8 ahead and seemingly on their way to an easy third set win. However, after a five-serve series from d'Elia, Docklands were back in with a chance and Wessex didn't have another gear to respond to the deluge coming their way from Docklands. The Espinoza switch back-fired this time with Wessex four points up when he entered the court but then set point down at 23-24 when he departed. Docklands took their one chance to take an unlikely lead 2-1.

That doubled the number of sets Wessex had lost all season and clearly hit them hard as Docklands raced into a 5-1 lead in set four with the majority of Docklands' points coming from Wessex errors. But the league leaders recovered from 12-7 down to within a point, forcing Hopper to call a time-out. Docklands re-established their sideout game and from that point on Wessex failed to score a point on their serve. The build up of pressure, the extent of which Wessex had not experienced so far this season, started to tell on their relatively young side. Docklands were dominating the attack through the middle whilst the Docklands' blockers were putting up wall after wall that Wessex struggled to breach. In the end, Docklands sealed the match with a 25-19 fourth set win.

The last time Docklands won the title in the 2nd tier (2000-01 season), they went unbeaten in a 16-game season and only dropped five sets. Up until Saturday it looked as though Wessex would at least match that achievement. Saturday's result didn't make that much difference to the league table with Wessex remaining on top on sets difference. At the half way stage of the season it means that all seven remaining fixtures will be crucial for both sides and it could all come down to the very last match of the regular season when Docklands travel to Wessex in April.

Hopper commented after the match, "This has been a real team effort with everyone playing their part either on the court, supporting during the game or in training. Everyone worked hard for this result and we executed our game plan very effectively. I don't expect Wessex to lose another game until we play them again, so it's down to us to match that run and maintain our own level in every game".

Docklands now have a break of over a month before they face Danes Watford at Bacon's College on 12th January. As Danes are the only team to beat Docklands in the league, the east London side will not be taking their opponents lightly and will look to start 2013 with a bang.

Saturday 12th January 2013

London Docklands vs Danes Watford

Result: 25-23, 25-19, 25-19 (3-0)

London Docklands started the new year as they finished the last one, with a crucial win in National League Division 1. After producing the performance of the season to see off table toppers Wessex before Christmas, Docklands hosted Danes Watford in their first match of 2013. Earlier in the season Danes had stunned Docklands in their second match of the campaign, with a comfortable 3-0 victory. But since then Docklands have improved with every game and were dead set on gaining revenge over Paul Westhead's side.

Both sides were missing their talisman - Docklands were without captain Mark Baechli after an injury in training, whilst Danes had to play without ex-GB international Steve Fee who had the flu. Danes made the better start, leading 8-4 after good blocking by Marcin Lasocki and Michael Pagalos. Docklands began to find their feet and service pressure by Tom Wenzel and Nicolò d'Elia saw their side tie the scores at 19-19. The pressure was mounting on Danes' fragile passing unit and as they had been forced to play without a libero, Docklands were able to limit Danes' attacking options. Alessandro Galli was next up to torment Danes' passers and he duly helped Docklands take a 23-19 lead. Danes made a mini recovery but Docklands held their nerve to seal the set 25-23.

Docklands took an early lead in set two and were in control throughout the set. Coach Andy Hopper brought in Raul Sanchez Galan to bolster his attack and the Spaniard quickly got into his stride. With Galli and Matteo Cottignoli, he provided d'Elia with a stable platform to run his offence and Danes had no answer. Docklands cantered to the set 25-19 with a short run of serves by Slawek Omlyski underlining their dominance.

The home side maintained their form into the third set and led 16-12 at the second technical time-out. However, with Danes gaining consistent success through Pagalos and Andrew Tucker, they clawed their way back into the set, forcing Hopper to call a time-out at 17-16. Docklands managed to wrestle some control back and after kills by Platon Vogiatzoglou and Omlyski, they led 22-18. In the end, two Danes' handling faults in a row gave Docklands the set 25-19.

Docklands briefly returned to the top of the table until Wessex defeated Birmingham later in the day. These results mean that a small gap has opened up between the top two and Danes. Hopper commented afterwards, "We dealt well with the disruption caused by Baechli's injury and considering the amount of training time we've had since Christmas we performed well. We'll certainly have to up our level next weekend. Knights have consistently caused us problems and we'll have to be on top of our game to win".

Docklands remain at Bacon's College for their next fixture against London Knights on Saturday 19th January.

Saturday 19th January 2013

London Docklands vs London Knights LSVC

Result: 25-23, 21:25, 25-13, 25-22 (3-1)

London Docklands moved to the top of the National League Division 1 table after a hard fought victory over London Knights. Until the first match of this season, Docklands had not defeated Knights in three attempts, but a confident display at Bethnal Green saw them seal their first victory. With Platon Vogiatzoglou now in the US, Pawel Stankiewicz stepped into the opposite slot with captain Mark Baechli set to be sidelined for at least another month. Knights' squad included ex-Docklands player Matt Butterworth and they gave a debut to libero Panikos Patsalides, who impressed Docklands enough to give him the MVP award.

Docklands started well with Knights unable to cope with the range of Slawek Omlyski and Raul Sanchez Galan. Stankiewicz produced a string of jump serves to help take the score from 5-5 to 11-5. The home side dominated the play and strolled to the first set 25-13.

A new formation for Knights in set two had immediate success, forcing Docklands coach Andy Hopper take his first time-out, 6-2 down. Docklands managed to grind their way back into the set after good work by Tom Wenzel and Alessandro Galli saw the gap narrow to one point at 19-18 to Knights. The visitors recovered to open up a 22-19 lead after two consecutive points from Stefanos Doukidis. This proved to be the crucial break as Knights held on to take the set 25-21.

Docklands made another slow start to the set and quickly found themselves 4-0 down. They managed to re-establish their sideout game before another run of Stankiewicz serves helped Docklands tie the score at 8-8. The set continued to be tight with neither side able to open up a significant lead. Docklands were the first to make the break with Wenzel leading the way, applying subtle service pressure. A combination of Knights' errors and persistent blocking by Docklands saw the first set point at 24-20. A serving error gave Knights a slim chance and after two deceptive Taku Yamamoto serves, the comeback was still on. But after a substitution delay he could only find the net with his next serve, giving Docklands the set 25-23.

Set four was another close affair with Docklands just ahead at the second technical time-out 16-15. More consistent serving by Stankiewicz helped Docklands edge ahead 18-16. They maintained their slender lead with Sanchez Galan showing off his variety of shots from front and back court. In the end it was left to Sanchez Galan to provide the winning point and seal a crucial 3-1 victory.

With a number of other matches postponed due to the bad weather, Docklands were able to leapfrog Wessex BU at the top of the table. Docklands will probably only hold onto top spot for a week, when Wessex next play. Docklands must wait until 16th February for their next fixture, another home match, against London Lynx 2.

Hopper commented after the match, "It may not have been pretty at times but the important thing was the win. We stuck together well when the pressure was on and won the important points."

Saturday 16th February 2013

London Docklands vs London Lynx 2

Result: 25-19, 21:18, 25-22 (3-0)

London Docklands maintained their hopes of automatic promotion to the Super8s with a hard fought victory over local rivals London Lynx 2. The win sees Docklands remain in second place after Wessex survived a potentially tricky double-header weekend to open up a small gap at the top of the table having played a game more than Docklands.

It was Lynx who made the better start, winning three quick points to stun their hosts. But Docklands responded confidently and turned the tables on Lynx to lead 5-3 after kills by Raul Sanchez Galan and Slawek Omlyski. Docklands were now into their stride and a run of five serves by Tom Wenzel increased the pressure on Lynx's young side. Lynx threatened a recovery but when the set reached its critical period Docklands had too much and reeled off five straight points to win 25-19.

At the start of set two coach Andy Hopper introduced Alexander Abadjis for his Docklands debut. Abadjis had a solid game and will help provide good competition for the opposite slot. Docklands opened up an early two point lead and just did enough to control the score. Docklands were siding out with ease but again left it till later in the set to turn their dominance into points on the scoreboard. In the end another Wenzel serving run put the set beyond doubt to seal a 25-18 second set win.

Lynx seemed down and out but they started to show some real fight in the third set, finally taking the game to Docklands. Some strong net play from 16-year-old Donnique Mabena and ex-Docklands player Miroslav Gospodinov helped the visitors open up a six-point lead at 15-9. However, a serving error following a time-out sparked Docklands' revival as Nicolò d'Elia applied subtle service pressure on Lynx's passing unit. A spectacular block by Omlyski on Mabena brought the scores level at 15-15 and despite losing the next point, it was clear which team enjoyed the second technical time-out more. Docklands maintained their momentum and took the lead at 17-16. Lynx fought on but clever hitting by Alessandro Galli and Sanchez Galan took the set away from them. Docklands sealed a 25-22 third set win with a Galli kill.

Hopper commented after the match, "After such a long break it was good to get going again. It wasn't our best performance of the season but this was a potential banana skin and we managed the situation well. We lost the same fixture last season so it was good to bury that ghost".

Docklands now have the chance to go unbeaten at home for the whole season with just Nottingham Rockets left to play at Bacon's College in three weeks time. The last time Docklands achieved that feat was in the 2000-01 season when they won the old Division 2 without losing a match. However, before that, Docklands travel to bottom of the table Birmingham on Saturday 2nd March in search of their tenth league win a row.