



MVL NATIONAL VOLLEYBALL LEAGUE
MATCH REPORTS

Men's Super 8s

Saturday 29th September 2012

Newcastle Staffs vs Coventry & Warwick Riga

Result: 25-23 7-25 22-25 24-26 (1-3)

A bumper 70+ crowd turned out for this match, the first top flight volleyball played in Staffordshire since the team's relegation in 2010. This really was to be a match between the young, inexperienced 'Castle team that had only recently come together, and a Warwick team bursting with experience and familiarity. It would also see the return for the first time of Andy Riding who liberoed for 'Castle for a few seasons including the relegation season before transferring to Warwick rather than play in the lower league.

Without Guy Banwell who was unavailable, 'Castle started with Samuel and Williams as passer-hitters, Chambers opposite Allen, Allison and Roberts middle and James as libero. With Roberts liberoed off court at the start this meant that the average age of the starting 6 was just 18.5 but the team started brightly trading early side outs. The first set was far from a classic and Riga's experienced players were able to find their rhythm first. De Hoogh and Turnbull were fed well by Wyles to put their team ahead, but it was clear that 'Castle were up for a fight. The set remained close throughout, with the home team's setter showing his skill and experience to deal with some below par passing and keep the attack flowing. Allison secured a big block and the momentum clearly stepped in 'Castle's favour and they sneaked the set 25-23.

Riga were clearly fired up by losing the first set and battered their opponents with a barrage of intense play that just never let them off the hook. Williams in particular was struggling to pass but coach Lovell stuck with the team on court for a prolonged period and did not give Williams the break that he was probably looking for. Eventually Lovell introduced himself to try to secure the pass but it was to no avail as he too was beaten by Riga who singled him out. There was nowhere for 'Castle to hide and it was perhaps a good thing that the set was over quickly, a humbling 25-7 result.

In truth such an inexperienced side it might have been expected that 'Castle would fold at that point and go down to a heavy defeat, but the young charges came out of the blocks with real focus to bounce back. Straight away they did a better job in serve reception, helped no doubt by Riga's serve intensity dropping from the heights it reached in set 2 – and this enabled Sam Allen to give 'Castle a more credible attack. The set was tight and Riga were ready to query decisions by the officials time and again – perhaps 'Castle's refusal to buckle had unsettled the visitors but they were clearly concerned about getting the match wrapped up as early as possible. Despite a great fight from the home team they were unable to take the set but it ended very close at 25-22; they were definitely in it and looking to take the match to a decider.

Set 4 started close with James growing in confidence as libero and taking increasing responsibility for the ball whenever there was the opportunity. The frustration for 'Castle though was unforced errors, whether they were through the wings in attack or in the block where 6' 8" Elliott Allison was penalised for net touches 4 times in the match. Soon Riga had opened up what

looked like an ominous lead of 18-13 and the crowd sensed it was game over. There then followed a stunning fight back that will give the supporters and team heart for the rest of the season. Point by point 'Castle clawed their way back into contention, and the temperature rose on court markedly. Williams wiped off the block convincingly to give 'Castle an important bit of momentum which was followed up by a double-touch from Riga's young setter Ballance.

The teams traded service errors and the match was all square before Allen released Roberts in the middle – his speed beat the block but the ball bounced out off the top of the net – match point to Riga. Wyles set his reliable middle blocker Turnbull who inexplicably hit 2m out of court. Even more bizarrely the referee awarded the point to Riga whose bench rushed the court to celebrate victory. Cue protests from 'Castle captain Roberts which resulted in a let being given and then when this was queried the point went to 'Castle. Both teams were now operating at the edge of their physical and emotional capabilities. Riga sided out and then when 'Castle failed to kill their attack the visitors hit off the block of Roberts and Williams to secure the win.

Saturday 17th November 2012

Newcastle Staffs vs London Lynx 1

Result: 23:25 26:28 11:25 (0-3)

This was a crucial game for 'Castle as they looked to take their first league win of the season in the top flight, but without Allison (shin splints) and with Lambe on the bench but not in kit due to patella tendonitis they were on the back foot in the week before the match. Lambe has added greatly to the passing unit since signing for the club, and without Allison further call-ups were needed from the second team.

The match started very evenly with both teams feeling their way into the action. Chambers got a couple of big kills for 'Castle, but so did the Lynx opposite and at the first technical time-out it was a close as it could be at 8-7. The next period of the game though saw Lynx take the advantage, largely due to a long series of 'Castle errors and suddenly it was 16-11. Straight out of the time-out Lynx took a further 3 points in succession and at 19-11 'Castle were staring down the barrel of a heavy first set defeat. Coach Dave Lovell made a couple of changes and the introduction of Nafioğlu in the middle made a big difference. He showed more energy than Samuel and was clearly 'up for it.' 'Castle went for broke and served a lot tougher than previously, which put more pressure on Lynx who then saw a series of attacks blocked convincingly by the home team. Suddenly 'Castle were back in it but it was just too late that they had responded. At 24-22 Banwell got a great kill to make it 23-24 but the big passer hitter then served just long to give the opening set to Lynx.

Despite the great fightback from 'Castle they were unable to carry that momentum into the second set and found themselves 8-4 down. Yet again it was unforced errors from 'Castle's young and relatively inexperienced team that was costing them dearly. With their serving intensity dropping, those Lynx attacks that were being blocked so well in the second half of the previous set were now beating the block. But, again 'Castle started to fight. Vatolik added great energy as 'Castle retained the back court setter and Lynx really began to feel the pressure. With Vatolik having acted as a pressure release for 3 rotations Chambers re-entered the court for a couple of great points and the pressure was really on Lynx who were cracking. The visitors made some horrendous errors and when the setter completely missed his left side hitter with a wild delivery, Sliti lost his temper and kicked the post next to the referee. The yellow card was produced and suddenly it was 24-24. Sadly for 'Castle the yellow card served to spur on Sliti, and 'Castle probably on balance didn't need that to happen in their scoring favour as the international player sided out and went to the service to give his side the advantage. 'Castle clung on but eventually the set went to Lynx 28-26.

After two tight sets like that 'Castle were implored to push again and Lovell stuck with the same side, but very quickly it became apparent that things would not follow the same pattern. Williams, who had been fighting hard all game was withdrawn, as was Allen for a period, and Chambers - it really was all change for 'Castle as they looked to salvage pride out of the set. Ashton was on court and along with Francis and with both youngsters front row 'Castle fired well, Ashton getting two very impressive kills. But there was no way back in this set and somehow 'Castle had found themselves on the end of a 3-0 defeat.

Saturday 24th November 2012

Team Northumbria vs Coventry & Warwick Riga

Result: 25:21 25:14 25:21 (3-0)

Team Northumbria men's volleyball retained their unbeaten record and ensured that they would be on top of the Super 8s table for yet another weekend. A comprehensive display against Coventry and Warwick Riga at Sport Central cemented the hosts' reputation as the rising force in British volleyball. And TN made light work of the task that lay ahead of them by dispatching fifth-placed Coventry in straight sets with a 25-21, 25-14, 25-21 win.

It was once again the offense that led the way throughout the match and head coach Dave Goodchild admitted: "Offensively we were superb. John Chapman passed the ball really well today. Kieran Sowdon is getting better and better every game with his setting and distribution, as well as the way he is running the offense. I thought he was brilliant. Paul Welsh was outstanding again with eight kills from nine attacks."

Goodchild was pleased with the overall performance but still highlighted certain areas that needed to be worked on. "Overall I'm quite happy with the performance but we can still do a lot better," he added. "We need to do the small things better such as the off-shots and broken play. We need to defend better as a team so I'm going to make that a focus for the next couple of weeks. Ultimately for us it's about keeping our focus, maintaining our unbeaten run and setting our own standards whilst pushing each other on."

Looking forward to next weekend TN are switching gears and preparing for a third round cup clash against the Nottingham Rockets. TN will travel down to the East Midlands on Saturday and Goodchild is more than aware of what cup success would mean.

"It is vital," he added. "All the guys are buzzing for success in the cup and our goal is to make it through to the final. I want to win the National Cup. It is a big aim of mine and something I have not achieved in my managerial career thus far. We are all very keen and focused on winning the cup but we must remember to take each round as it comes. Our primary focus this week will be returning from Nottingham on Saturday evening victorious."