

Sitting Volleyball Grand Prix Tier 1 Final Saturday 15th April 2012

Eagles & Gators vs East London Lynx

The remarkable progress British sitting volleyball has in the anticipation of this summers Paralympics was showcased in a thrilling five set Grand Prix final that featured 12 GB players and Dutch Paralympic medallist Sanne Bakker, who won bronze in Beijing. What promised to be an exciting game on paper – did not disappoint!

High intensity play from the first point was matched blow for blow, but an ace serve by Lynx Captain Raimondo edged his team into a lead 8-6 at the first technical timeout. Lynx continued to pull away and lead 11-7 midway through the first set. Eagles and Gators were forced to take their first timeout at 8-13 down. This paid dividends as clever play by Matt Rogers secured a vital point to kick start an Eagles and Gators comeback. However the Lynx defence proved difficult to break down and Coach Ashley Trodden was forced to take a second time out at 11-19 down. Some impressive hitting from GB player Justin Phillips kept Eagles and Gators in the game however it wasn't enough to close the gap, as Lynx closed out the set 25-18.

Lynx continued their momentum into the 2nd set, opening up a small advantage. Justin Philips again stemmed the flow of points and took advantage of a few communication errors from Lynx, pulling back some points, bringing the score to 6-4 to Lynx. A long rally at 6-4 with high energy play saw the ball cross the net several times. The point went to London Lynx, with John Munro finally dropping the hammer after a good set from Claire Harvey.

The point was kept alive at 7-5 by a great pick up from Richard Dobell, who teamed up with Matt Rogers for a point winning block. An ace from Dobell levelled the score at 7-7, and pressed on to open up a small lead a 9-7. More strong serving, this time from Rogers kept the run of points going as the lead increased to 12-8. Ian Legrand was forced into taking a time out for Lynx to try and stop Gators running away into too big a lead, however the 4 point lead was maintained through to 19-15. Martine Wright was substituted into the action to try and bring Lynx back into contention, but the change didn't have the desired effect as 2 further strong serves from Charlie Walker pushed Gators even closer to levelling the match. Lynx managed to get the serve back, with the effective Anton Raimondo firing some bullets over the net, closing the gap to 23-21. A timeout call from Coach Trodden broke up the fluency of the Lynx attack, and enabled Gators to close out the set.

The 3rd set had a tense start, as both teams knew it was crucial to gain the upper hand with a 2-1 set advantage. Gators took the first time out as they advanced to an 8-5 lead. Some solid blocking from John Munro kept Lynx in the hunt, as the scores were tied at 12-12. Lynx rallied to take the lead 16-14, however the communication errors once again crept in and allowed Gators to take 3 straight points and regain the lead. Points were traded back and forth, with neither side giving away cheap points. A time out was taken at 22-20 to try and settle the nerves, however it was Lynx who showed the better composure to gain 3 match points. Philips managed to save one for the Gators, however a big spike from Raimondo sealed the set for Lynx.

The 4th set was nip and tuck through to the first time out at 7-6 to Lynx. Gators hit back with an ace from Rob Richardson. This set off a run of point for Gators in a set they knew they had to win. A 16-11 lead turned into 24-18 lead as they continued to pile the pressure on the Lynx blockers. They took the set at the first time of asking, taking the match into a 5th set decider.

With the 5th set only being played to 15 (2 clear points needed), both teams knew a good start was crucial. Lynx got off to a good start, but the Gators snapped back to level up at 4-4. A net touch by Gators gave Lynx the lead, but once again it was pegged back at 7-7. The change of ends saw Lynx in the lead t 8-7 after Dobell volleyed long. Philips followed up a big with a huge block, however it was Lynx's turn to peg the lead back. This seemed to inspire the Lynx team, as they pushed on to a 13-11 lead. Rogers ended a great rally with a big block, as the score was closed to 13-12. The Gators were unable to stage yet another come back, as Lynx got the crucial 2 points, and with it became the 2012 Sitting Grand Prix Series Champions.