

Leeds Carnegie 1 Vs Team Northumbria

The highly anticipated women's Super 8 Final between Leeds Carnegie 1 and Team Northumbria didn't disappoint.

Team Northumbria looked like they hadn't left the court after their win the day before against Malory Eagles. The Carnegie women struggled to get to grips with the early pace and quickly found themselves trailing 8-2. Magda Ropiak was connecting cleanly with all her hits, and was ably backed up by Hannah Gary and Luca Toth. Leeds still didn't have any answers after the first time out, as Northumbria continued to dominate. Unforced errors on the Leeds side were matched with winners from Northumbria. An ace by Federica Guida extended the lead to 14-5 as Leeds coach Simon Loftus looked a little shocked with what he was witnessing. A few long serves from Northumbria helped Leeds get back into the set, however they never looked like threatening Northumbria whose confidence was clear for all to see. Some clever tips by Northumbria setter Lindsay Johnson caught out the Leeds defence, and they could only look on as a cross-court spike from Northumbria took the set 25-17.

Northumbria took an early 3-1 lead at the start of the second set, however some smart work from the Leeds front three pulled the score back to 4-4. Solid defence from Libero Heather Lieberman enabled Leeds to create some accurate plays, and they found themselves leading for the first time in the match at 7-6. A great set of blocks by Team Northumbria saw them recapture the lead at 12-9, forcing coach Loftus into a timeout. The Northumbria defence continued to look very strong at the restart as they pushed on to a 16-11 lead. Poor communication from Leeds meant they weren't getting to the 2nd ball early enough, allowing Team Northumbria to open an 8 point gap- a lead which looked almost impossible to turn over based on the Leeds form. This proved to be the case, as Northumbria took a 2-0 lead, winning the second set 25-15.

Leeds didn't look like turning things around as the third set began. A fortunate net cord off the serve gave Northumbria a 7-4 advantage. Leeds managed to claw themselves slightly closer as they started to build rallies with some consistency- something that was sorely missed during the first 2 sets. Northumbria called a timeout at 10-10 as they could sense Leeds starting to come back into the match. Northumbria began to struggle with their serve accuracy, seeing many go long. This handed the initiative to a Leeds side that were slowly but surely playing their way back into the match. The game for them had turned into an effective sudden death play off, knowing that nothing but a win would be good enough to stay in the match. Leeds opened up their biggest lead of the match as they moved to 19-14 after a disputed point. Leeds coach Simon Loftus called a timeout at 22-18 to keep his team focused. It did the trick as they won 25-22 to take the match into what promised to be a thrilling 4th set.

Leeds seemed to have found their groove and were now starting to dominate on court, turning the match on its head. A timeout at 5-2 to Leeds halted their run of points, however they remained up at 8-5 when the first technical timeout was called. Paula Scott began to receive more sets, and her spikes were getting through the Northumbria defence. 3 successive points from Leeds took them to 12-7. They continued to hold out against a persistent Northumbria team. The set was evenly poised at 14-15, but a small run of points for Leeds gave them the mini cushion they needed to calm the nerves. Jessie Forrester came on for Leeds to try and sure things up. An ace from Virag Farkas took the score to 20-15 with Leeds now looking well on top. They closed out the set 25-18 after a monster block from Forrester set up a match point.

After winning the 2nd and 3rd set, Leeds looked to be in the ascendancy, however it was Northumbria who got the first mini lead in the final set, as they went 4-2 up. Neither team wanted to let it slip away after working so hard to reach this stage. The change of ends saw the score poised at 8-7 to Team Northumbria. Some nice interplay between Kai and Lindsey Johnson kept them ahead. Captain Magda Ropiak then took charge of the rallies, setting the play up well from the back of the court. A small run of points took them to match point at 14-10. They just needed the one, as they became the 2012 Women's Super 8s Champions. Congratulations to both teams for reaching the finals, and for making it such an epic and memorable game.