

 CARDIFF CELTS **37**



BIRMINGHAM BLACK CATS **33**

 DATE: SUNDAY 11TH OCTOBER 2015

 COMPETITION: GB WHEELCHAIR BASKETBALL ASSOCIATION DIVISION 1 SOUTH

# BLACK CATS START WITH A STUTTER AS CELTS CLAIM FIRST WIN

 REPORT BY: RYAN SMITH (BIRMINGHAM BLACK CATS PLAYER AND MEDIA OFFICER)

The Birmingham Black Cats made a shaky start to their 2015-16 campaign as Cardiff claim their first win their first game of the season.

This was the Black Cats first game back in the First Division and were determined to make a statement of intent that they were going to be serious competitors this year. Their starting 5 were Rob Smith, Mab Hussain, Bill Takis, Sho Ayub and Lee Woodward.

Cardiff were also a newly promoted side, and were keen to erase the memories of an opening day defeat to London Thunder by beating their Midland counterparts for the 4th time in a row.

The game started with both teams looking very lively on offence, using crisp rotation of the ball to split apart one another. However, despite numerous chances being created for both teams, rusty finishing was hampering the chances of the two sides. However, it was Cardiff who found their range quickest, making the most of the 2 man game opportunities the Black Cats were affording them towards the latter stages of the quarter. For the Black Cats, the fast break option was looking the most productive, with Lee Woodward and Mab Hussain breaking at pace to profit from the high percentage rebounding figures of Rob Smith and Bill Takis. It was intriguing that such an entertaining opening quarter could end up so low scoring, but at the end of the first it was the Celts who held a narrow 10-7 advantage.

The black cats opted for a change of emphasis in the second quarter, with ShoAyub putting a man out play into motion numerous times to make the most of the considerable height the black cats possessed. The tactic worked, with Lee Woodward's clever curling then creating the space for Rob Smith to coolly convert numerous baseline shots in the quarter. However, Cardiff were still getting looks under the basket against a Black Cats defense that was looking uncharacteristically nervy against the two man game offence. The head coach responded by bringing Julia Smith into the frame, and her communication was key in solidifying the black cats defense. What's more, the Celts couldn't handle the mixture of pace and power that the Black Cats offence was bringing to the table. Richard Kilburn was introduced late on, with him making some good offensive drives as his team began to pick up momentum. It seemed that the Black Cats were racing through the gears as they took a 23-20 lead into the break.

The third quarter saw the Black Cats reverting to their starting 5 once again, looking to push on to victory. However, Cardiff had made a change to their tactics during the half time. Noticing the threat posed by the partnership of Rob Smith and Lee Woodward in the first half, Cardiff began overloading on that side when they dropped back into a zone. What's more, the 2 up press that the Celts were implementing were seriously hindering the black cats progress, with the Birmingham side looking short of outlets from each inbound, resulting in labored and static offensive plays that rarely looked like threatening the opposition basket. On defense, the team were doing well to jump on Cardiff's outside shots, but too many layups were conceded directly following a transition. However, the team showed great character when things weren't going right for them, and battled admirably through the quarter to ensure that, at 34-27 down, they were still well in with a chance of winning.

As the 4th Quarter approached, head coach Rob Smith told his team that in any game the opposition were going to have a dominant period, and that now all that they had to do was to play their own game, or 'follow the signs' as Bill Takis and Richard Kilburn liked to call it, and they were would be there or there abouts at the end of the game. It seemed to work from an offensive point of view, with Woodward and Ayub working tirelessly to get their forwards up the court and under the basket. However, much like the first quarter, the baskets wouldn't drop for the away side. What's more, Cardiff were still getting their big players, Taylor and Matthews, under the basket with relative ease, and the Black Cats could count there selves lucky that they weren't punished. To deal with this, Julia Smith and Ryan Smith were rotated into the lineup, with the latter making his 1st Division debut, and both worked well with Ayub and Hussain to nullify the home teams threat. From there, the Black cats went all out for the win, with Rob Smith coming back on as part of a full court Black Cats press. And it worked, with the black cats No.15 scoring 2 quick fire baskets to cut the gap to 4 points. That would, unfortunately, be as good as it got for the black cats, as 2 late Rob Smith 3 point shots came agonizingly close to going in in the final few seconds. Bill Takis and Mab Hussain worked tirelessly as the clock ticked down in a desperate attempt to win the ball back, but as the Celts drew a technical foul with 6 seconds left it was clear that the game was up.

Despite going down 37-33 in the end, head coach Rob Smith was upbeat despite the result. 'I don't think I could be too disappointed with today. Yes we didn't play as well as we normally do, both offensively and defensively, but you have to take into account the fact that we haven't played in 4 months. I think there are things that we need to address and work on in training, our shooting especially which was very rusty today, but we did play some good stuff, particularly in the first half, and I feel that we will get better and better as the season progresses.'