

## A HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL LEAGUES.

### 4a. NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP CUPS, 1975.

If the race for the League title was exciting, the Championship Cup Final was doubly so, with one of the very few games which really deserves the description "going right to the wire".

This Season there was only 17 entries for the Cup, with just seven non-League clubs feeling they could face measuring their performance against the big teams. This was the lowest for some years, and indicated the growing numbers, and strength of the National League teams – as well as the growing gap between those who played regular competitive national basketball and those who did not.

<u>CLARK'S MEN'S SHOES NATIONAL CUP, 1974-1975</u>			
<u>First Round</u>			
Birmingham	(x) 68		
Oxford University	(x) 103		
<u>Second Round</u>	<u>1/4 Final</u>	<u>Semi-Final</u>	<u>FINAL</u>
Cambridge	(x) 54		
St.Luke's Exeter	(1) 63	St.Luke's Exeter 89	
		} Embassy All-Stars	101
London Metros	(1) 100	Embassy All-Stars 115	
Embassy All-Stars	(1) 130		
			} Embassy All-Stars 82
Loughborough All-Stars	(1) 84		
Wilson Panthers, Doncaster	(1) 77	Loughborough All-Stars 87	
		} Loughborough All-Stars	76
Vauxhall Motors	(x) 81	Vauxhall Motors 51	
London University	(x) 50		
Cleveland Strongarm	(1) 62		
Granwood Coventry	(1) 92	Granwood Coventry 76	
		} Granwood Coventry	78
Malory, Lewisham	(x) 66	Oxford University 75	
Oxford University	(x) 71		
			} Sutton & C. Palace
Sutton & Crystal Palace	(1) 80		
ATS Giants	(1) 72	Sutton & Crystal Palace 78	
		} Sutton & Crystal Palace	91
Pirates (Guildford)	(x) 45	Avenue 74	
Avenue	(1) 82		

In the second round, both League clubs who were paired with non-league opponents cruised through, although Exeter's 54-63 success at Cambridge was less convincing than Avenue's 45-82 stroll at league aspirants Pirates. In the four all-league clashes there were wins for Granwood, at Cleveland, and Palace at home to ATS, while Embassy were running riot 100-130 at YMCA.

Shock of the second round was probably Loughborough's 84-77 home victory over the Panthers, while Vauxhall Motors and Oxford University were the only non-league teams to reach the quarter finals, albeit with victories over other non-league opponents.

Embassy continued their high-scoring ways in the Quarters, with an 89-115 success at St. Lukes, and Loughborough easily disposed of Vauxhall, 87-51.

There were much closer matches, however, for holders Sutton & Crystal Palace, 78-74 at home to Avenue, and Granwood Coventry, who survived by a single point at home to an American-packed Oxford.

In the semi-finals, Embassy ran up their third century of the competition, with a 101-76 victory over Loughborough, while Palace edged past Coventry, 78-91, and the stage was set for the "big two" to contest the Final for the third consecutive Season - but this time back at Wembley, for the first time since 1952.

The match, watched by a crowd of around 5,000, lived up to expectations as a hard-fought, sometimes physical, encounter.

The first surprise came as the teams were announced. with SCP coach Stuart Marquis having left out 7'1" Fred Petty, who had apparently said he "couldn't give 100% in the match".

So, Jimmy Guymon, Ian Day, Mike Stewart, Martin Hall and Bob MacKay lined up for Palace, to face Pete Sprogis, Dave Shelley, Steve Schmitt, Nigel Acres and Stu Turpie.

Palace opened the more brightly, and after six minutes, as Guymon left the court for treatment to a nose injury, SCP led 16-5. As Day continued to dominate the scoring, this was extended to 21-9.

Sprogis at last hit his first from the field, but the comeback was mainly sparked by Schmitt, on the boards, and three minutes before the interval the game was levelled at 31-all.

There was still little to separate the teams at the break, with SCP shading it 38-37. Schmitt led all scoring, with 17, while Guymon led SCP with 13.

The big surprise was that Sprogis had not yet found his range, with just three field goals, and half his 12 points coming from the foul line.



Stu Turpie rebounds, despite the attentions of MacKay (12). Stewart (10) and Schmitt watch and wait. (Photo Barrie Eveleigh)

The second half proved a different story entirely. The big men were dominating the boards, but this merely opened the way for Sprogis' shooting, and twelve minutes into the second half he had taken and made eleven shots, while he was a perfect 12 of 12 from the line for the game!

Embassy led 69-54, with just eight minutes remaining, and Stuart Marquis had to call his last Time Out.

Palace went for their favoured running game, and it seemed to pay off as they hit twelve unanswered points, to bring the score back to 69-66.

The sixteenth minute of the half really was all-action, as fourteen points poured in, and Stu Turpie and Mike Stewart both left the game on five fouls. With 2 1/2 minutes to play, palace led 78-74, but Shelley and Scmitt levelled at 78-all, with two minutes to go.

Hall and Sprogis exchanged baskets, and the scores were tied at 80, and then, amazingly, Palace failed to get a shot away in their 30-second possession. Embassy had the ball, and there were sixteen seconds left. Inevitably it was peter Sprogis who brought the ball down, found his "hot" right corner spot, and slotted the ball home to take his personal tally

to 36, and to give his team the two point lead, with just 11 seconds on the clock.

It appeared to be all over bar the shouting ... but there was still plenty of that, and tension, to come.

As Jim Guymon desperately tried to get free for a final shot, he was fouled by Dave Shelley, just as the buzzer sounded.

Embassy were in the ten foul penalty, and Guymon was a lonely figure as he stood on the free throw line. A 76% free-throw shooter over the Season, he had two shots to take the game into overtime.



Two more for Schmitt as he executes a one-handed dunk. (Photo: Tony Duffy)



**If Tony Duffy's photo, which graced the cover of "Basketball" magazine didn't win Sports Picture of the Year, it damn well should have done!**

**Guymon is a lonely figure on the line, with arms in classic "follow through" position, as the ball approaches the hoop. The backboard frames the time remaining "00:00", umpire malcolm Heath indicates "no rebound", and the score, 80-82 can be seen at the far end.**

The first shot dropped cleanly through the hoop, but the second hit the front of the ring, bounced agonisingly up, and, seemingly in slow motion, fell away from the basket. If Guymon had looked a lonely figure before the shots, he must now have wished for the court to open beneath him. Embassy had emulated their rivals' feat of the previous Season, in lifting the League and Cup "double".

"Jim Guymon must have earned a niche in the annals of history" wrote Mel Welch in the magazine. Twenty six years later his words still ring true, and he's certainly earned a niche in the annals of this History! To Guymon's credit, accusations of "lacking the killer instinct" were brushed aside.

"Everyone who's played basketball has been a bum and a hero" he said in an interview in "Time Out" the following year, "I've been a bum before, and I've been a hero. And I'll be a hero again, and a bum again. It's that kind of game."

And he was ...

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## The National Junior Cup Final:

"No Dennis, don't shoot ... don't shoot ... oh, good shot!" Coach Morris Wordsworth's despairing cry to Dennis Latibeaudiere is my abiding memory of the Junior Final, as the Panthers' substitute scored his only points of the game to take it into overtime!

The 1975 Junior Cup Final, played as the curtain raiser to the Men's event, brought together the 1972 finalists, Doncaster Panthers and Avenue, with the latter bidding for a hat-trick of victories, and revenge for their 13 point defeat three years earlier.

The game remained close throughout, with Avenue shading the first half, 28-26, and the teams level at 44 mid-way through the second half, and 58-apiece with five minutes remaining.

Clive Brent and Tracy Claridge gave Avenue a six point advantage, for the biggest lead of the game, and with three minutes left it looked as though they were on course to retain their title.

A well taken Time Out by coach Morris Wordsworth steadied the Panthers, and Trevor Denny and John Belk pulled it back level at 68 as the game entered the final minute.

Just 21 seconds remained, with the scores still tied, when Panthers' Steve Chandler fouled out, and Clive Brent sank both free shots to put Avenue back ahead, 70-68.

In came Latibeaudiere, and his first touch of the ball saw him wide open, 15 feet from the basket. Other, more experienced, players may well have had a better percentage chance of scoring had he risked the pass, but Dennis had just one thing on his mind, as he drained the two and took the match into overtime.

The extra period remained close, and once again Avenue edged ahead, leading 78-76. Trev Denny hit just 1 of 2 from the line, to reduce the margin, but a few seconds later he was at the stripe again, and this time 2 of 2 gave the panthers the lead, 79-78, going into the final minute.

Avenue just could not penetrate the Panthers' defence, and the Yorkshire side regained the Cup which they had won three years previously.

Even thirty-three years later, however, the abiding memory of that final is of the relief on Dennis Latibeaudiere's face when "that shot" went in.



**The 1975 Panthers Junior team have a bad-hair day. John Belk wears #7, a fresh-faced Dave Middleton #9, and Mike Davis #4. Dennis Latibeaudiere (10) scored the basket which took the game into overtime.**

### Acknowledgements:

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