



Full Court

February 2021



LEADING LADIES

THROW YOURSELF IN AND HAVE FUN!

Coaches' Corner
Coach Douglas



24
SECONDS

Sam Lewis

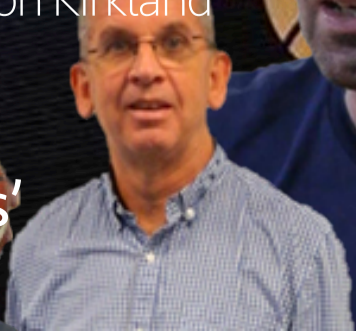
OPINION
Dan Cox

NEWCASTLE
EAGLES

More than just a club
Rob Palmer & Kirk Dawes

Yesterdays Man
Simon Kirkland

Newcastle Eagles'
Paul Blake



ISSUE 2



Managing Director - The YBL C.I.C.
JAMES DAVIES
Intro

Welcome to issue two

Welcome to the second issue of Full Court.

We had an overwhelming response to our first issue with some grandiose statements about our content and the overall feel of the magazine. We had some constructive feedback and we listened to your opinions.

Full Court saw impressive readership figures, above our projected target for the first issue (see the credits for those numbers). We're looking for a solid target for this issue too.

Our team were looking at content for issue two and three, all the way back in November, we wanted to make sure that we brought our readers some diversity of topics and different content of interest to our readers.

This issue sees an array of basketball figures from across the basketball family grace our pages. We see the return of our '24 Seconds' regular feature, this

issue with Sam Lewis from Basketball England and with hear the opinion of Daniel Cox in our new regular feature 'Opinion'.

We have interviews with Rob Palmer and Kirk Dawes from City of Birmingham Rockets, Simon Kirkland from Sports Structures UK and Paul Blake from Newcastle Eagles.

Our main feature this month celebrates three female players who now play for Manchester Magic; Dominique Allen, Ebony Horton and Rhianne Bailey.

The Full Court team are extremely excited about this issue. We hope that all our readers see what a production like this does to bringing the basketball family together.

Best wishes

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COLUMNIST



Are there barriers to being a player/coach?

Should every team have a non playing coach?

I found myself watching the BBL game between Worcester Wolves and Glasgow Rocks [Friday 7 January].

At the start of the game, the commentator announced Gareth Murray as a Player/Coach for the Glasgow Rocks. I was a little surprised! When you think of a professional team they normally have a separate coach.

Did you know that across the pond, the NBA has not permitted player/coaches since 1948.

Fabulous Flournoy, had previously held a similar position at the Newcastle Eagles BBL team until 2019 when he moved to Toronto Raptors as part of their coaching establishment.

Generally, we see more player/coaches in local league teams, where they lead the team both on and off court, usually completing their job description with that of court captain, kit washer, first aider and team manager. I know I can imagine quite a few of you reading this article now are nodding your head in agreement.

At a local league level the player/coach is usually in a comfortable position to see the game on and off the court which

allows the game to flow smoothly and for the player/coach to make informed decisions particularly as the competition is normally a 'friendly' one.

This changes when it becomes an important game, when deciding league standings or when that competitiveness to win that cup game emerges. It's at these times that player/coaches will get 'into' the game and sometimes forget they are coaching, which then effects the dynamic of the game and the bench players are often forgotten or under utilised. This can change the attitudes of the bench players who also have a drive and desire to play and help their team win.

It's a difficult job to do. If you start the game do you play a few minutes, come off and observe. Do you play a few minutes each quarter? There is no definitive answer to this.

So how does a player/coach put the team first? How do they balance their own court time? Will it make a difference or are they struggling with the thought that their team think they are getting more court time because they are the coach?

This concept doesn't work for junior

teams, or even college/university teams, as having a non-playing coach helps shape their team and guide them when playing. As a pure adult team this concept has, in my opinion, mixed results.

Watching Glasgow Rocks I saw that Murray is a key player of his team, he has a strong assistant coach but did Coach Murray make the best decision on the day?

In the last minute Wolves were leading by 6 points. Murray from was on the 'Rocks' bench. He didn't play as much as I thought he should have and that could have made a huge difference to the result.

So if I was asked would he have made a difference being on court in the last minute of the game? - Yes! Could Glasgow have won the game with him being on court? Possibly! 🍌

Have you got a view or comment on player/coaches? Can you say if the dual role of a player/coach is positive or detrimental for a team. Send us your replies and we will feedback on this topic in our next issue with some of your views, stories and comments. Over to you.

MAIN FEATURE

Throw yourself in and have fun!

Manchester Mystics Rheanne Bailey, Dominique Allen & Ebony Horton

10



6



Newcastle Eagles'

Paul Blake

16



Yesterdays Man

Simon Kirkland

28



More than just a club

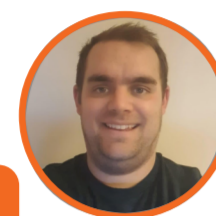
Kirk Dawes & Rob Palmer



22

OPINION
Dan Cox
REGULAR FEATURE

4



24
SECONDS
Sam Lewis
REGULAR FEATURE

26

Coaches' Corner
Coach Douglas
REGULAR FEATURE



Lewis Stokes
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COLUMNIST

The YBL through tiers and lockdowns

This current basketball season has been a strange one. At first it seemed like there would be a season, then going into the season there was doubt but still optimism.

However, when the second lockdown was announced all non-elite basketball was cancelled, but there will be a possibility for alternative competitions later on in the year.

Throughout the first part of the YBL season no team had played any games.

It has been a frustrating time for everyone who is involved with the clubs.

"It's been quite unsettling" said Bromsgrove Bears director of basketball Dawn Hall.

Throughout the first part of the season areas were put into different tiers and then into another lockdown, this created an uncertainty within the clubs.

One week they would be training and the next week they would not.

"It's almost like a carrot has been dangled and we've not been able to get to that carrot" said Dawn.

The Birmingham Bucks are in a bit of a different situation to most clubs. They have only recently been formed so they have had a few more difficulties.

Most of these difficulties have been financial due to them not being able to train much.

"It was something that came up in the first lockdown" said Lewis Atkins Birmingham Bucks club secretary and safeguarding officer.

Even though they do not have a youth team, yet they do plan on implementing one in the future.

"The aim was that in a couple of years we should be able to maintain the senior part was to branch into the youth side of the league" said Atkins.

However, firstly they need to keep a good number of senior players.

The youth players themselves have responded well to the circumstances. They have followed the guidelines and have also stayed mature about the situation.

Recently it was announced that all non-elite competition had been cancelled.

Unfortunately, that means that all the YBL seasons have been postponed.

"I think there was a sense of hope there and that essentially now has been taken away" said Dawn.

These new circumstances have also affected the directors of the YBL.

They had the season ready to go but then the tier system was introduced, and they had to adapt to the tiers that each team were in.

"James Davies did a magnificent job rearranging leagues so that we could put teams in bubbles" said Kim Accalia, the YBL's Administrative Director.

The biggest change the YBL faced was the furloughing of Managing Director James Davies.

"Without James we cannot provide the clubs, teams, and players within the YBL the service that they are used to, and that we want to give them" said Kim.

However, they are looking to do multiple things that can help the clubs, such as running courses and workshops. Trying to get the clubs and stakeholders involved so that the courses can be taken by people in the clubs.

"We will keep working on Full Court, the online magazine throughout lockdown, with new material, interviews and reports to give the readers something basketball related from the region and beyond." 🍌



Issue 2
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on the cover - in pictures

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PICTURE SUPPLIED BY Dan Cox

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3 **COLUMNIIST** The YBL through tiers and lockdowns Columnist with Lewis Stokes Sports Journalist, Birmingham City University

3 **INTRO COLUMNIST** Introduction & Are there barriers to being a player/coach? Columnist with James Davies James Davies

4 **REGULAR FEATURE** 24 Seconds with Sam Lewis Words by James Davies & Kevin Henry. Picture provide by: Sam Lewis

6 **INTERVIEW** Newcastle Eagles' Paul Blake Interview by James Davies and Kevin Henry. Pictures supplied from Newcastle Eagles; thanks to Mansoor Ahmed & Peter Simmons. Thanks to Dan Black.

10 **MAIN FEATURE** Manchester Magic's Dom, Rheanne and Ebony - Throw yourself in and have fun! Words and interview by Kevin Henry with James Davies Cover picture by Mbonengi Greg Mpofo. Article pictures by Mark Ferris, All Sports Photography

16 **INTERVIEW** Yesterdays Man with Simon Kirkland Interview by Kevin Henry with James Davies Pictures provided by Simon Kirkland

22 **REGULAR FEATURE** Opinion with Dan Cox Words and pictures provided by Dan Cox

26 **REGULAR FEATURE** Coaches' Corner No gym - No Problems! With Coach Douglas Words, pictures and practice material provided by Paul Douglas at All City Basketball.

28 **INTERVIEW** More than just a club with Rob Palmer & Kirk Dawes Interview by Kevin Henry and James Davies Pictures provided by City of Birmingham Rockets Basketball Club

35 **INTERVIEW** Finally... How are you? with Kevin Henry Interviews and words by Kevin Henry

Issue 1 Readership - 1 Dec 2020 to 31 Jan 2021

Day of Release - 1 Dec 2020

424 Total Readership

1,248

Social Reaches

	VIEWS	SHARES	LIKES	REACHES/IMPRESSIONS
FACEBOOK	14	16	3,412	
INSTAGRAM		38		
YOUTUBE	61			
TWITTER				77

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24 REGULAR FEATURE SECONDS

Sam Lewis
Relationship Manager | Basketball England

WE ASK THE QUESTIONS, THEY ANSWER WITHIN 24 SECONDS!

Interview hosted by Kevin Henry and James Davies
Picture provided by Sam Lewis



We start our interview via Teams on a gloomy evening in early December and after a few technical issues we get underway. Kevin Henry (KH) and James Davies (JD) speak with Sam Lewis (SL) from Basketball England to get his answers to some probing questions.

Sam Lewis starts us off with a great opener, "Let the interrogation begin".

JD: You have 24 seconds to answer Sam... Keep it straight to the point SL: Per question, or for everything?
JD: No! That's everything. 25 questions, 24 seconds to answer everything!
SL: Let's go!

JD: How long have you been involved in basketball?
SL: One year and four days!
JD: You've only been involved in basketball for a year in total?
SL: With Basketball England for a year, but with Wheelchair Basketball for nine!

KH: Why did you get involved with wheelchair basketball first?
SL: I did it at university, there was one module and I did a taster session with the kids. I enjoyed getting the kids in the wheelchairs! I then moved to Coventry, I'm originally from Northampton, and I got involved with the team here.
KH: Interesting fact!

JD: What's your role with Basketball England?
SL: My title is Relationship and Coordination Manager for the West Midlands and the South West, but because of furlough, Relationship Manager for England!

JD: Relating to your role with Basketball England. How have you found working with other leagues?
SL: There are huge differences between the sizes and participating within adult and junior leagues. Overall, they all have a common goal, putting on competition for people who love playing basketball. Whether that is at a younger age or slightly older age, the passion is there.

JD: Is wheelchair basketball a different type of ball game?
SL: To a degree, yes, tactically the game is different. The principles throughout basketball remain the same. My particular passion is getting the kids involved. Working with children, as opposed to teenagers and adults. I build a good rapport with the juniors; like the 6 and 7 year olds through to 14 year-olds.

This is the age I like to work with to build their foundations. Yes, in principle they're the same sport, but it is a different ball game!

JD: What would be one highlight from your basketball career?
SL: It would have to be the West Midlands, Under 19s team becoming champions, at Worcester Arena. It was about three years ago now, I think it was. It was the pinnacle of my coaching career.
KH: Very good.

JD: Sam, tell us something really interesting about yourself?
SL: [ponders for ten seconds...] Something quite obscure?
JD: Anything!
SL: So, when I was younger, 16 or 17. In the same week I learnt how to swim and took my national lifeguarding qualification.
JD & KH: [At the same time] Interesting.
KH: Did you pass both?
SL: Yeah!
JD: No! He failed his swimming!
KH: Advertisement for Baywatch!
SL: I definitely didn't get that role!

JD: Have you ever seen a YBL game?
SL: I don't think I have seen a YBL game, because of Covid happening around March time. One of the things I have been aiming to do is get along to a few CVLs, from clubs around the area. I went to see a CVL at Gloucester Saxons, where I got to speak to Joe Grainger, who unfortunately, passed away recently. I got to find out what he does, and those he engages with; children in the CVL environment.

JD: What has been the best game you've seen and why?
SL: Aww! The final of the school games, that took place in Stratford-upon-Avon [last year]. That was a brilliant game, a lot of kids representing their school as well as local league clubs.

JD: Finally Sam, what would be your mic-drop moment!
SL: When I was younger, I represented my county in football.



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Newcastle Eagles' Paul Blake



Full Court sat down with Paul Blake, Managing Director, to discuss the famous title winning club, Newcastle Eagles. From their successful grassroots and academy programmes to the magical BBL team.

James Davies (JD) Paul, thank you so much for sitting down with us. I'm relatively new to basketball, I've only been involved for the past ten years. Anything outside the Midlands is a bit blur for me. I'd like to know how Newcastle compares from then to now. How was that journey for yourself and Newcastle?

Paul Blake (PB) Newcastle was originally Sunderland Basketball Club, in 1978, I think, ran by Dave Alder, who ran it for many, many years. He moved it to Newcastle in 1995/1996 season, when Newcastle Arena opened. After the first season Newcastle United Football Club came along and purchased it from Dave. It then became Newcastle Eagles in 1996/1997.

From 1996 to 1999 it was run through Newcastle United. I was the Marketing Manager for Newcastle United Sporting Club, effectively the basketball club, Falcons Rugby and the ice hockey team which at the time was Newcastle Cobras. Moving to General Manager for the ice hockey and the basketball. Then the football club pulled out. My then boss, now business partner and I, a chap called Ken Nottage, who you might remember Kev [Henry], was a long time BBL, Carlsberg and top division British and England player. The two of us decided to take the franchise on. The owners of the football club; Sir John Hall, Freddie Sheppard and Douglas Johnson didn't want the three clubs to fold, they wanted them to survive, however they could. They were happy to sell them all for a pound! They found a consortium for the rugby, they couldn't find a buyer for the ice hockey team,

believe it or not, and Ken and myself took the basketball club over. We went from employees to owners. I took over the running of the club and Ken moved south to Gloucester Rugby Club, where he was chief executive for 12 years. I've been here ever since! I took the club over in 1999.

In a funny way that's when the journey really started. From then to today, it was trying to turn a seriously loss-making club, with no community activity to really talk about, to something that wasn't losing money, was us being very active in the community. We are not just going into a school and delivering a coaching session and leaving, we were trying to build the infrastructure of the sport in this region, trying to create a successful BBL team on the court. Somewhere in the mist of that we had ambitions to play in Europe and build our own venue. All of which, when taking over in 1999, sounded like, pie in the sky!

Kevin Henry (KH) From 1999 to now, did you think, this isn't going to work out? Did you have doubts? Did it go to plan?

PB I tend to take life a day at a time anyway! Did I know where it was going? Initially, when I took it over, I was 28 [years old]. At the time I was a little naïve. We can take this anywhere. At the time I thought I'd give it two or three years and see where I can take it. Get it to break even. In reality, it was three or four years for us to break even. If it was making a loss, it was ↓



Words by Kevin Henry and James Davies
Pictures supplied from Newcastle Eagles, thanks to
Mansoor Ahmed and Peter Simmons.
Thanks to Dan Black.

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www.newcastle-eagles.com



going to fold anyway. It wasn't like Ken or I had the financial resources to try and plug any holes. I was in a bit of a daze for it breaking even for a few years.

The next challenge was to build a community programme, but we don't have a venue, like Nechells, for example, to carry out that community activity. We're just hiring lots and lots of venues around us. There was no focal point.

It must have been 2002, 2003 where we got to the point, that this has got a future.

Teams then started winning in 2005 and didn't stop winning. The team has just qualified for the BBL Cup Final. That's our 28th final since 2005. It's just mind boggling really. That was on the court. That's telling the story regionally and for us to engage with our regional partners. Off court stuff, is just as or even more important. Somewhere between 2003 and 2010, is it feasible to get a building built? Or are we just going to be hiring? It took us to 2008/2009 for us to realise this is doable. Then, another, eight to nine years for it to happen.

KH In your mind, how long do you think it was going to take?

PB We moved from the Newcastle Arena to Northumbria Sports Central, which was a £35m sports centre, with a 3,000 seated venue. Both myself and wife, Sam, who is Chief Exec of the [Newcastle Eagles] Foundation, were both students at Northumbria. We had close relationships there. We said, if you can get that built, we'd move from the arena, as it was a better size for us. We moved in 2010. At that point, we were signing an agreement for a three-year move. At the same time, we said, we are signing, but we are looking at our own build. We wanted to be open and transparent. We thought it a possibility, be it a 10% chance of happening. That was when the conversations started, and we opened in 2019. It was six or seven years, on or off. Relationships with the council was brilliant. We had to fit in with their planning. Wait for them before we could approach Sport England. We had the money in 2017. In all this I was still running a club and continuing with the community projects as well.

KH From a far, looking at what you have done, a lot of people admire what you have done as a club, because it not easy to stay the course. A lot of clubs, no disrespect to some of them, that want things done quickly, and maybe cut corners. To stay that course and be successful, to do what you had to do must of took a lot of effort?

PB The basketball community is very close knit in this country, but it's not big. We like to tell ourselves that it is, and we should absolutely tell everyone outside the community it's big. But it's not as big as it should be. You know as well as I do Kev, there is a demand to play, but if you can't cater for that demand, they then go away and play another sport. What you're doing is catering for a demand in your area and we are trying our best to do that in ours. You're spinning a lot of plates at the same time and you can't be good at everything. Or it's hard to be good at everything. What we've tried to do from day one is to say there is a propensity in our basketball workforce nationally. There's a propensity for us to focus on performance. There is absolutely, nothing wrong with that! As a result of that our sport doesn't focus on participation enough. It's the missing piece in the jigsaw. At some point we have got to do both.

What we've done, and not dissimilar to what you're doing [the YBL], we've thrown all our eggs into the participation basket. To try and build a participation base in the North East. To grow the sport and to grow participation. It helps from a marketing and an attendance point-of-view at home games.

We build from the bottom, a wide range of participants and grow into performance. The performance is only as good as the coaching staff that you have. We've had to grow a young coaching base at the same time. Also, we're doing this from a single programme, we're not selecting players from different programmes. Selecting players from the Newcastle Eagles Programme.

We had the question thrown at us for years. You have all this participation happening. Where are the Newcastle Eagles stars? All I would say to that is we are getting really heavily into that area. Our head coach just said; 'What about Toad Sam. What about Eddie Matthews? What About Shaun Murphy? Who's just coming through. What about Tenby? What about Sobre?' Three of whom are getting minutes played now. One of them can't play for us as he is at Princeton [USA], but is here right now. He would have played some serious minutes for the Eagles team as a 19-year-old. But he's not been released from the NCAA system. He's phenomenal talent, he's GB talent, he's got to be 6'9". Great kid, high basketball IQ, and a high IQ in general. That's the type of athlete we want to see coming through the ranks consistently.

What we are good at doing at this organisation is building a participation base. As multiple clubs and a huge CVL (Central Venue League).

JD That was going to be my next question Paul. How has your academy and junior programme helped with your participation pot and your more elite junior programmes? I know you've just touched on that, but that was genuinely my next question.

PB There are a few steps to this. How we've built things up. We have a Primary School Programme which has been running for about a year when I took over in 2000. Called Hoops for Health. Historically being delivered to 120 primary schools every year. The BBL players are involved in that programme. It's not a bag of balls coaching programme. Roll model based programme, where we go in a coach different themes in an afternoon. The players come out [Primary School Programme] and then coaching programme follows, our community coaches, which then follows a tournament for the primary schools and a final at Eagles games.

This is done across six councils we operate in, and each council has its own Hoops for Health programme. With their own tournaments and finals and then we have a championship of championships finals. That's Newcastle, Gateshead, North Tyneside, South Tyneside, Sunderland and Northumberland. That's a start and stop programme, there has to be an exit route. Any child from the Hoops for Health programme has a club within a mile of where they live. We only operate in a primary school where we have a club site within a mile. We've operated up to 35 club sites at any one time across the six councils. Of those there are 11, what we would call 'big clubs', the smallest of which as 50 members, the largest has a 190. That's Cardinal Hornets which is based in the east side of Gateshead.

They are all our clubs, by which I mean the Foundation, the charity. All of those clubs have multiple age groups. The youngest age group is Under 8s. What comes from that is the Central Venue League and the biggest reason for having our own venue is that we can operate the CVL out of it, not having to hire a venue. Pre-lockdown, last February we finished with 94 teams playing in the CVL, mainly from the 'big eleven', but with some external junior clubs we don't run and some slightly smaller clubs that we do run.

That's the model. The Primary School Programme feeding into the Club Development Programme. We probably should, but at the moment we don't put a lot of effort into senior school basketball delivery. I think that is because of where basketball

is at in senior schools now compared to when I was in secondary school in the early 80s. It was much bigger then! I grew up in Bristol, that's how I got engaged in the sport. PE teachers then were more invested as most of them played, I'd have to evidence this though. I find we have challenges with secondary schools in our area.

JD I think that's a problem across the board, in any city or area.

PB We need to revisit this. Bizarrely, most of the clubs are based at secondary schools. We feed in at Under 10s and retain as much as we can. That builds our participation base, of circa 900 to 1,000 young people playing in our CVL each week. There's another sub-set of players that go to these clubs that are not interested in competing. You could add a possible five or six hundred to that 1,000 that are not participating. Alongside the general community coaching contracts, we have. The numbers grow and grow!

From there we have yearly trials, to find a way into the Academy. That's boys and girls; Under 14, 16 and 18. Girls we were running U16 and U18. You can leave the CVL and become an academy player. The rule we have right now is, which comes up for debate for years and years, which is if you are an Academy player you don't play Central Venue League. In principle this is to allow spots for young participation player at CVL and for those that have moved up a level to Academy, not to take those spots.

Our Academy has been running for 12 to 14 years now. The boys came second in the U16 and U18 Premier North (JNBL). We're competing at a level. The test in of the performance is always; how many players are we getting on the England or GB programme. We have had a steady flow of talent, but we'd like to improve in that area. The next step is how do you jump from there to BBL!

JD From the participation and the CVL side to the Academy side, looks like you've been doing it a while and it works very well. It's a model that could be repeated across all BBL clubs. I don't think many BBL clubs do that. To fit in with that, how do you retain your players from your academy to your senior teams/BBL? Do you keep them, or do you look at the bigger picture? Do you look at European and American players?

PB There is a pathway here, not that we have played in Europe at this point, what do you need to compete in Europe? What you need to compete in BBL? What does it take to compete at BBL level and thrive to play in Europe? Equally, when you're a player reaching 18, between 16 and 18, what are we doing there? We have DICE academy as well. That gives a focus of 12 players ten hours a week of additional coaching.

There is a cross-over between our DICE and our U18 JNBL team boys. There's a bit of conflict there as well. The number of games, and what the priority is, the level of competition between DICE and JNBL. We're looking at that. That group of players there, for us, have a choice of jumping up to Eagles U23s. They play Div3 EABL or our university team, that plays Div1 EBL, which is becoming quite competitive. It's always been competitive, but it looks like the standard is jumping again. Like



Solent, who we played in the BBL trophy last year. We have access route into our Eagles University programme. Shaun Murphy, who plays on our BBL team and Tenby Abantu, last season, before going to Princeton. All played for the university. You've got those routes and you have BBL. Alternatively you've got to go to the States. This is the key issue for us, where our young players have to understand. We recruit players from the U.S college or European market to the BBL team every year. Or our own system. If you are good enough to be the type of player, we are going to recruit; including the likes of: Flex Furgu, who was a player and captain of Notre Dame University last year. Being that level, that's seriously high-level college, we would have loved Tosan to have stayed here and played during his college years. He's been offered a scholarship to go to Princeton. He's doing really well and he's started really well in his first year.

We have a problem, in a sense, that players are at a level who can play BBL at 18, but don't stay. That's the same level of player that we end up recruiting four years later. Those British players, who come out of that four years later, are being told by their agents to play in Europe. Don't go to the BBL go play in Europe. It's a higher level. Or go play in Germany, as the standard is better, and the money is better than the U.K.

This is going to change because of Brexit. We're going to reverse to pre-1995. When British players, tended to stay here. Before the European market opened up. If you're that level of talent and you can earn that amount of money you've got to go. If we can't produce the money to pay those level of players... that's why I wanted to build my own venue. I wanted to create more money to put into our professional team, to make sure we recruit the best and keep the British players. The best way for me to grow, the business is to have complete control over all of the income stream. Which is essentially what we have now.

JD The last question, which links in with what you've just said, is there another programme that Eagles could achieve in the next five to ten years, which would help every aspect of the Eagles itself, from the grassroots to the BBL team itself?

PB Bottom line is, at the end of the day, it comes down to if we can generate the income to do it. Yes, we can grow the volunteer base, ultimately, we have to grow the business. We have an opportunity to do that now at the venue we are in. We were operating for a year before lockdown. Our money needs to be invested back into the teams at all levels; growing the club system and CVL participation, club coaching mentoring, the academy, the men's and women's side, continue to upwardly invest, so we can afford the best talent we can play in Europe. A good part of that has to be with British players. It has to be. Practically post-Brexit. We have to have the talented players. British kids that have proven themselves, be it the U.S system or the system over here.

JD Final thoughts on Newcastle Eagles.

PB Our focus will always, while I'm involved, be on participation. We will never lose that focus. Looking at what follows from performance to BBL. ●



MANCHESTER MYSTICS LEADING LADIES

THROW YOURSELF IN AND HAVE FUN!

We catch up with the leading ladies of Manchester Mystic's WBBL team. Join us in welcoming Dominique Allen, Rheanne Bailey and Ebony Horton to the pages of Full Court.

Kevin Henry (KH) devilishly rubs his hands together as he ponders asking the first question. Or is he cold? Dominique Allen (DA), Ebony Horton (EH) and Rheanne Bailey (RB) look directly into the camera in anticipation. Is it going to be one of those interviews?

The three leading ladies in question all hail from the Birmingham area and have moved to various places and end up playing together in Manchester. We wanted to know what it's like in Manchester.

"It's a fun city, when it's not in lockdown..." Rheanne starts us off. "...lot's going on, for basketball and outside of basketball. It's a really nice balance. Since I've moved to Manchester, there's been a lot of opportunities outside of [playing] basketball. Coaching, refereeing and lots of sports development. I've explored different ways to be successful in basketball. It's been a real good four years."

"For me it's been nice," Dom jumps in, "as I've been playing with my friends. I've played competitively overseas and coming back home I appreciate playing with people that I have known for such a long time."

Ebony continues "It's nice to experience a different city, I've lived in Loughborough, but its nice to experience a big city. It's been fun! It's got a different vibe. I like it. I appreciate the opportunity I've been given."

KH It's been a challenge for pretty much everyone. Most levels of basketball players have been unable to start training or even playing with the current restrictions across the country. You've been a little more fortunate that you're able to play. What's it like playing in this current format during the pandemic?

RB Currently, we aren't actually playing basketball. The reason our team decided to postpone, part of our season, until 13 February, is we have a few high-risk members on our team. As a team we didn't feel 100% comfortable. We took a stance, if one person wasn't comfortable playing then as a team, we should respect that. All for one and one for all! That's where we are at, at the moment.

We are still lucky enough to be able to be at training, if we want to get into the gym. That's good for our fitness and wellbeing.

KH Sad!

RB Sad, but necessary at this time. It's not like we have the recourses like the Premiership or the NBA, where we're able to get tested every day so we can feel 100% comfortable. The way Covid is reported to be spread it is quite dangerous. We don't know if we are a carrier. Then to go around the country! The WBBL have done a wonderful job to ensure we can play.

KH What's it like playing at this level (WBBL) compared to other levels, like local league?

EH Everyone is more prepared. There is lot more on the line, more to lose. When you play WNBL, you could lose a game and we'll be back tomorrow or next week. While here, everyone has to learn the same thing. Everyone's in it. More strategic.

James Davies (JD) More organised!

EH There are a lot of teams that are really organised.

DA Way more practice.

RB We get a lot of international players and some of the best players from the U.K. in the league so the competition from position to position is really high. It makes it more a physical and fast paced game, you have to be in control and make the right decisions. But when you play WNBL you can be one or the other and still be successful. But, in the WBBL you have to have both. Basketball IQ and athleticism and physicality.

KH Do you feel that there is a vast difference between the WBBL and WNBL? Have you seen changes in the standard?

DA I was playing in the States, when I came back it was already the WBBL.

RB There wasn't a massive change, because Div1 became WBBL. Every year the standard improves. Look at it now, if they were to face an old Div1 team, there would be a difference. Each year team resources, and organisations have gotten better, therefore being able to recruit a higher calibre of players.



KH What would a normal day be for you, in the week and on game day?

DA Our days are so different!

RB Our days are different across our team, also across the other clubs. It depends on the club recourses. We train pretty much every evening for two hours except for a Friday. Then Tuesday and Thursday we have strength and conditioning. So those two days it'll be three hours. The game days on the weekend. If things were 'normal' then some of the players would also have a BUCS game on a Wednesday too. Some of our players do this with full-time studying and some with full time jobs! Which is me, unfortunately.

Dom starts to smile, while Rheanne finishes the last sentence, and with that grin, points to herself and adds **(DA)** 'Not me!'

KH It is different for everyone. Ebony, I know this is your first year. Is it different to Loughborough?

EH Vastly different, I'm not going to lie! Manchester is full of experienced players, while Loughborough brings in new fresh players all the time. Everything has to be more routine and structured. Here, everyone here is like a vet, Dom, Rheanne, Nicolette, Hannah Shaw, Georgia, that's a starting 5, that's been playing for how many years playing at the top levels.

KH That is what people look at. The girls in the YBL's All Girls League, they would be interested to see what the commitment is like.

RB Don't get me wrong. There will be a team that would train just twice a week. Depends on their situation. Or there will be teams that train twice a day. As athletes can train twice a day. If, some of us were to train twice a day, there would be a lot of injuries. If we were to train twice a week, I don't think we'd get enough out of it to be successful at the weekend. Usually a daily training.

KH You've all come on different journeys to get where you are now. If you would have done a different sport, apart from basketball, what would it have been?



DA It's properly netball, because I was really good! No! Don't mention that! I ran Track a bit in high school. I wanted to go to America, so basketball was my path to get there.

KH Okay we won't mention **netball!** (Ops! Did I forget to take that out? **JD**) Without basketball, netball wouldn't be here!

KH If you didn't do basketball what career would you have taken?

DA I don't know! Because I don't know now! Does any under 31 years of age have no clue as to what they are doing? I love sports, and I'd like to work within sports. I don't know if I would have gone down the same route as my dad [Clive Allen - Sporting Club Albion]. Having a club, but I'm not sure that I want to go into coaching. Honestly, that's a terrible question to ask me! 'Dom doesn't know what she's doing with her life'.

RB That's okay Dom.

JD It's took me nearly 40 years to decide what I want to do.

EH I feel like I would have done anything, football, track. I would have been in something. I feel like I was an angry kid... so.

DA You're probably going to have to re-write this whole thing.

EH You ask the questions; you're going to get the truth!

KH Ebony, what would have been your career choice?

EH Me! I would have been a bum! Honestly, I don't think I would have had a career? I'm being serious. Basketball drove me to get my GCSEs. I knew if I didn't have my GCSEs I wouldn't be able to play in America. That was my incentive.

KH Rheanne?

RB I played every sport when I was a kid. It could have been anything. Football, hockey, boxing!

DA I could see you being a boxer.

RB I could see myself pursuing boxing now. I think I would have been more successful at that! In terms of a career, I think I'd be doing something like I am now. Sports development, physiotherapy. I think I am on track to being where I wanted to be now, seeing myself as a kid. But when you get here, there is more you want to do and achieve.

KH The more importantly, why did you choose basketball?

EH Basketball chose me!

KH That can't be your answer? Can it?

DA I wasn't forced into it, because I was huge. But yeah. Clive. Didn't really have a choice.

RB If I'm honest. I got praised in it quicker. I started playing basketball within the year I was on regional and national programmes, but the other sports I was still playing for fun. Basketball progressed quickly. I really enjoyed playing basketball a lot. The people I met through basketball. New friends. Naturally, I went down this path and filtered out the other sports.

EH I didn't choose basketball, basketball chose me!

KH I Knew you were gonna say that! I knew one of you were going to say it!

EH Was I was 13 or 14, I was with the wrong type of crowds. I decided I need to do something for myself and stop following other people. Stop getting into trouble! I tried out Birmingham A's, Nigel Hanson was the coach, I went there and fell in love with it. I knew, after school, I'd be going there. I'd get on the 51 [bus], get off at Doug Ellis [Sports Centre (Perry Barr, Birmingham)]. I think it was the routine and the fun aspect of it. All my friends now are from basketball. It's that connection that you have. You're in another community. Like another world, and you don't want to leave it and you don't want to know what it's like without it.

JD I think we'll have that as the headline on the cover! 'Basketball chose me!'

What advice would you give our younger readers? The YBL have girls who play in a mixed teams. What advice would you give them to push them in the right direction? To get them to your level, your standard.

KH You took the words right out of my mouth. If you were to talk to a young version of you. What would you tell them?

RB If they are already playing and you have a bunch of girls who are playing with the boys, for me, that was one of the things that set me apart. Because when I started playing in a girls'

team, I already had the physicality. I wasn't scared of contact. Then that physicality I was used to. It made me stand out from other players. Don't be disheartened. Don't give up, keep enjoying basketball as long as you can because once you then get into your own playing field, an all-girls team, you'll see a massive difference. Plus, if they don't want to be an elite basketball player maybe you can explore other routes, refereeing, coaching or table officiating. There are so many more different avenues you can take. You can be a photographer, or videographer and stay in basketball. Whatever route you take, and you enjoy basketball, stay involved.

EH Keep working hard, because you don't know where its going to lead you.

JD Ebony, you said something earlier, you had to do your GCSEs because you wanted to go to America. It was a nice point to make, I think, that statement goes a long way to the ethos of the YBL as an organisation. Not just as a player but as a person as well. It sits well.

KH C'mon Dom, your answer!

DA But, they've taken all the best answers! I hated playing with the boys, hated it. I went to Newcastle. Every opportunity to play I took, be that the BBL team. Playing against grown men. That got me ready for America and playing professionally. You should any opportunity you can take, even if that is with boys!

RB For me, basketball for me, is more than just on the court. For example, when I finished playing at Loughborough. I came home, didn't know what I really wanted to do. I played basketball with Georgia Jones, she called me up, and invited me to Manchester. Since then, I got my master's degree, I've got a job in Sports Development and Physiotherapy. Doors have opened for me for knowing people in basketball. If I didn't make that connection through basketball. That opportunity may never have presented itself. Even now, this opportunity it's occurred through basketball. It's the



connections you make on the way. You may go to America and come back and never play again. Dom, I know you can go all over the world...

DA It's ridiculous!

RB ...and have somewhere to stay.

DA I've been so, so lucky, basketball has taken me places. I can look at teammates and think, where do they live?

RB Eb, you know people in the States who you could contact and go and visit. You make lifelong friends. You could end up getting your next job through a basketball connection. I can't remember where I read this, but for women, basketball can take you all over the world. Football maybe too. Especially European teams. Not many countries play netball! Basketball has that advantage.

KH Ebony, I'm coming to you. What would you say has been your biggest challenge?

EH Biggest challenge. For me, it's channelling my emotions. When you start playing you feel entitled. Because you're younger, you're full of energy and life. You want to win. You don't want to put it across the wrong way. More places you go and play, you learn to fit in. Adapting to those environments. Birmingham is home and how you can act there. I feel in Birmingham we have this certain mentality and when you go other place, you don't have to necessarily have that.

DA Going to America was a big thing for me. I didn't have the smoothest ride at college, some games I didn't play, some seasons I didn't have the best stats coming out of them at the end of the season. Being able to play professionally, as I didn't think I'd be able too. I think, living that professional life. Going to a different club, not knowing where you are going to play. The first team I went to, the team didn't speak English, nor did the coach! Being in foreign countries. I think that was the biggest challenge I had to overcome. Off the court, finding out what I want to do outside of basketball, that's the hardest



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thing I think, coming to the end of my career. Most professional players, whose life is consumed by basketball, coming to the end of my career trying to find what fills that void.

RB Mine has been, similar to Ebony's to be honest, learning how to deal with my emotions too. When I left Birmingham, I was one of those players, if I was in a bad mood, everyone had to be in a bad mood. I would make it hell for the coach. I was a bit of a nightmare. I worked with Matthew Harbour, at Loughborough, on being a better leader, I then became the captain of that team. Once I learnt how to be a better leader and channel my emotions that was when my career really took off. That's when people would want me on their team then because of the positivity I brought and still be able to be competitive. Off court, trying to make basketball to better, especially for the women's game. To become better athletes. To provide opportunities for new players to play and new players to start earlier. That's a lot of the work I do off court now.

KH If I was young person starting basketball, what one piece of advice would you give me?

RB Throw yourself in and have fun!

EH Have fun with it, and never lose the way you have fun with it. The element of it changes when you move to an academy at U16 or U18s. The fun doesn't go, it changes. Remain true to yourself. What do I want to do? Where do I want this to go? Eyes on the prize! As well, building connections as you go. I know every coach I've had I am still in contact with. Like Nigel Hanson, I miss him! Steve Mroso, Stephen Hansell and Dawn Hall.

DA We all doing shout outs now? Because Dave Lyons was right up there!

KH Not to embarrass you all, who inspired you? Despite you thinking otherwise, you can be an inspiration to people or have an impact on people.

EH I would say for me it's Nigel Hanson. When I started, yeah, I was having fun, I was playing in normal trainers and tracksuit bottoms. I never had any gear. He saw me play and spotted something in me. One day he came with a pair of basketball shoes, socks and shorts. His faith in me that inspired me. Sedale [Hanson-Young], his son, seeing how good he was. It was something to mirror myself off.

DA No one person. I had a real good bunch of people around me. I remember my mom pushing me. I always ended up in the right situation.

RB So many to mention, I got into basketball in high school. Rob Paternostro, Leicester Riders coach, was in my school as a Learning Mentor. He sparked the passion, the enthusiasm he had to teach me things. Dave Lyon took over from there. Similar to Eb, I made the England camp. I didn't really have any basketball trainers, went to the outlet in West Brom, brought me my first pair. He said if you make the England team, you don't have to pay me back. I made the England team. He was like, I can throw away the receipt now! Little things like that, knowing people believe in you. I remember watching a basketball game and seeing Andrea Congreaves, see was just sick! At England U16s, she was my assistant coach! I had been playing in these trainers for so long, I was on a sprint and they ripped, my foot come out! Andrea and her partner brought me a pair of trainers. They were like, don't worry about it. Keep going you're doing really well.

KH Everyone who's been an imprint on my life, thank you!

RB Yep!

KH Last question! What do you want to achieve for next season?

EH You never know where you are going to be. I say... I want to keep getting better individually and help the team you are with.

RB The goals for me are less basketball orientated. I'm starting to feel more about the impact outside of basketball, as where I am in life. Whatever team I'm playing for, always make the programme better and leave it in a better position from when I started. Be that winning championships or a better community programme or even a better reputation. Help the team be successful.

DA Same! You don't know what's going to happen next year. I am coming to the end of my career. I'd like to be just a good teammate. If I can make them happy, I'm happy.

We leave it there, as we all start talking about cakes! 🍰



Words and interview by Kevin Henry with James Davies
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Yesterdays Man

Simon Kirkland

KH How have you been doing?

SK Yes great thanks. People might remember me from basketball in 2002 when I set up my own company Sports Structures. We do a lot of work in basketball with coach education and some work around equality, which is great fun and just enjoying working and developing my own company really, it's been hard work in the last few months, but we are coming out the other end which is great but just enjoying stuff. I am still connected with basketball, I have still got great friends in the sport one of them was just elected to the board [Basketball England] Sadie Mason. I'm involved and still speak to people regularly.

KH What made you choose basketball all those years ago.

SK When I did my degree when I became a teacher, I liked the game I had played at school it wasn't as competitive as it is now and the school, I was at was a non-basketball school but there was a teacher, Mr Wilson who fired my enthusiasm for it. When I went to do my degree to be a teacher I actually got injured and twisted an ankle. A basketball injury and I started coaching and I got the bug for coaching absolutely, I loved it. I did my coach quals with Dave Ranson who was actually a National Team Coach at the time at the Blackpool Easter School then did my next badges at Loughborough and then started coaching and teaching in North Birmingham which was just a rich bed for school basketball at the time.

Simon Fisher who some people may know was who is now performance pathways manager at wheelchair basketball his dad was a teacher at Broadway School, Dave Fisher he was a fantastic mentor and there was just a conveyor belt of high-quality players coming out of there that were feeding into the Bullets programme and feeding into the school programme as well. I just got the bug. I left teaching and went into managing a school facility, Holyhead and then became a Sports Development Officer and saw the opportunity of outdoor basketball courts. I generated some money through sponsorship and created outdoor basketball courts. I could just make a difference. Loved the people involved. Loved coaching. I think as a coach, you're the closest thing to playing in any sport you are the sixth "player" because you can seriously affect the game by your actions and by your calls more than in any other sport I think. I love that involvement, the tactical nuances of it all. I left Birmingham and joined Basketball England as their first National Development Manager and I thought this is a sport that can change people's lives. My first task was to develop the regional structure which is still in place today. I led the development of a new competition structure for the junior and cadet leagues which enabled a more competitive structure. Clubs were fundamental to this change. We achieved a lot I and after I was promoted to CEO I appointed a fantastic national development manager in Steve Nelson who was actually an ex-Birmingham lad who played for Worthing, he now runs West of England Sports Trust down in Bristol. I am still

in touch with him and his two kids who are playing for GB Luke and Kia Nelson.

KH From your basketball you have touched a lot of people's lives, and you have influenced a lot of people and organisations which you are very modest about it. I can say that you had an influence on me and basketball by the stuff you did as well. You talked about coaching. I went into coaching as well and I have watched you coach, learnt things from you and different things from different coaches. Who influenced you in your coaching style?

SK When we do the Level 3 [coaching course] we talk about philosophy and that approach. When I taught myself coaching it was what I have got this book and oh let's play zone and put five mats out and coach it that way. I soon learnt that this didn't work! I took a team to play Dave Fisher and just got pressed off the court and was like 'what is this all about?' Dave was an absolute mentor in terms of philosophy and approach, and I didn't have the athletic kids that he had but could play a press for a certain period of time. Dave was a big influence over me and then you kind of build up your coaching style from all sorts of places. People like Bernie Rigour who was at Aston Manor, another guy who I worked with, I then picked up a few more from football. So you kind of develop your own coaching style I also learnt a lot from someone you might know Elaine Gordon who led Quality Cats who was an absolutely fantastic coach and actually Ian Fuller. We were the coaching team at Quality Cats and Ian who is now an international netball referee which is slightly diverse. I think you build up your style from different people and I picked up approaches to coaching rather than drills and skills so I thought if that is the approach how do I then adopt that and I think sometimes people look to coaches to get drills and skills rather than actually what's their philosophy.

KH Do you think that your coaching and your professional career was mirrored? Is there a lot of things that you did in coaching that you use in life now? Any transferable skills?

SK Yeah, I think your philosophy of life is the same as your philosophy of coaching My values are loyalty, honesty and respect. when I look at people's values and how they behave. I think that then portrays itself into coaching and. I still do tutoring courses more with coach tutors rather than coaches themselves. What is your teaching coaching lifestyle and is it any different? You can be more genuine with your coaching and if you are clear about your personal life do you portray that through your coaching? Empowerment. I have seen so many coaches that are very command like and directional. They will tell you where to stand on court and I used to love coaching against those coaches because you disrupt that and immediately you get conflict between the opposition players and the coach because they are doing what they were coached and it isn't working!. They are on the court and that should be the basis of it. The players on the court and not you as the coach and they should be the decision

makers and prepared for decision making. Just touching on that I think, Dave Titmus, a very respected coach, wheelchair Paralympic bronze coach. He taught about principal offences and that was a bit of a lightbulb moment for me as a coach. He coached balance the court as a principle. You as players are out there you make a decision about this. My national team coach Laslo Nemo had Bucknall, Amaechi and Huggins and really high-quality players and he was like you're out there guys how do we beat Switzerland or Croatia? That was the real learning for me, and that personal philosophy coaching style is sort of mixed up in one.

KH As a coach if you have to pick a coaching memory what would you choose?

SK I will give you three.

I coached with Lazlo in Hungary, on a camp, and we were on for the championship and we were one down with about 3 or 4 seconds to go and a guy called Dave Waite a Birmingham lad who was my go to man. I needed somebody to go cross, pick across the baseline to open it up for Dave and we talked it through at the time and said does everybody understand. Yeah, off you go then and did he go across and open the space for Dave that base line - No did Dave get cut off did he miss the shot - Yes and we lost that game!

I think one of my real memories is I coached Birmingham Junior Women for a while and we didn't get all our players turn up for the first game and we played Ipswich and we got stuffed we came third and we lost 104 - 6 at the old Birmingham sports centre, a lovely court, and we set our objectives the following Monday at the training session that we would beat Ipswich because they were the last game of the season. We went to Ipswich and we had got all of our players and we beat them 64-48. Which was just fantastic.

Losing the semi-final of the Birmingham Schools Under 15's where we just got pick and rolled to death by King Edwards School and we just couldn't deal with it.

Three lovely memories, I think like you Kevin, its growing with a team and being with a team and that women's Under 18 team were brilliant because we grew, and we knew exactly what our objective was, and I think we came 4th in the league that year. That was the only game that they lost all season which was brilliant. Maybe 1997.

We have a conveyor belt of junior players coming through to the senior programme then and that was great.

KH Is there anything that you miss from coaching?

SK Working with a group of players over a season it's as simple as that.

KH From the time you were coaching, and you went into sports administration what made you take that route at that particular time.

SK I made a call to leave when I was in teaching for 6 years to some of the older PE teachers who were in Aston and Perry Barr and they were grumpy 50 year olds and I didn't want to leave PE in a grumpy way. I had always done a school's cricket or football management, I had always enjoyed administration, so that movement into sports development was an easy one. I wasn't too bothered about the high performance. The guys then in Aston two of them went onto work at the Villa and

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run the academy at the Villa for 25 years. I sort of got half an offer of going to work with them and I thought, no. My talent ID wasn't that good, my coaching was okay but by talent ID not. I enjoyed teaching and I moved into the administration side and thought can I make a difference to basketball? Well actually a good coaching structure, a strong robust club structure and access to facilities were the key things and I think that is still the case now to be honest. The competitive structure is a lot better now than it used to be to be honest but for me if you are developing performance players you need 4 things; fit healthy athletes, great coaches, high quality competition and good facilities.

I felt with basketball that the quality of coaching and the quality of competition left a lot to be desired. I think if you look at the national league and junior and cadets there is still quite a lot of blow outs. People are not learning coaches and players learn when it's a two- or three-point game every week they don't learn if it is a 30-point game they just learn how to lay upon their right hand so that is the bit that needs improving. I'm going to big you up a bit now that is where the YBL seems to be competitive, there are competitive games and that is that part that is really important. You grow as a player when you are under pressure. Southgate says, "he wants to test players to perform their skills under pressure. Anyone can spin a ball on their finger, I can, I can do a lay-up, but can I do that under pressure? Absolutely not!

KH When you went into administration what was your first role?

SK Into basketball it was as National Development Manager.

KH How did you go about getting that opportunity?

SK I was appointed after an interview and managed three development officers at the time Helen Kendal, Dawn Hodge and Sarah Wenham (then Mann) was the outdoor basketball officer then. The outside basketball stuff I had done in Birmingham had been translated into a lottery bid which was the OBI which was the Outdoor Basketball Initiative.

KH Were you quite influential in the design of the outdoor basketball courts as we know them now?

SK Probably yeah, certainly what we did in Birmingham, what annoyed me was that people were putting up playground back garden equipment in playgrounds so with, the suppliers, Probe Sport, which doesn't exist anymore, alongside a few other people who were developing the same sort of thing we put a very robust outdoor goal up and it had a meter square of concrete it had to be that solid and still there are probably about 8,000 existing around the country now with Adidas on.

What needed to be done with Helen, Sarah and Dawn was put a regional structure in place. At that time school's basketball was on the decline, junior basketball was on its way up and the national league was expanding exponentially. We were trying to put a structure in place that actually achieved in terms of growth of players and also quality of the competition.

I also put in a review of the coaching education system at the time. Basketball had had an NVQ in basketball that was great, it was really good, and it was deregulating that we need to get structure of coaching. Brian Aldred, who is still there [at BE], restructured the 10 to 20 years of the coaching structure not the coaching content. We were one of the leading sports having a coaching education structure back then. Steve Nelson was also hugely into it as well. I was passionate about clubs so we put in the club accreditation programme before which some people might remember as Club Mark that finished a couple of years ago that preceded Club Mark. My best sponsorship, well I was involved with the Sunny D programme, which was 3v3, but I also convinced the RAF to get involved with sponsoring junior basketball. The sponsorship was for 4 years but I think we got it until 2009 it ran for 9 years - so another 7 years after I left.

KH Was that how the final fours started?

SK Yes, at Cosford. We granted new kits to teams. I really don't know how many kits we got. You will probably still see kits around with RAF on the idea was that we would support clubs, they would get a kit, three basketballs through Baden and that was investing in the clubs and I think it worked really well. Branded up courts so made it a real spectacle.

KH I think you have missed something out which I think is key. It affected me personally in a positive way from a Birmingham point of view - you started off champion coaching if you remember.

SK Oh my god yes.

KH One of the things that you did about Champion coaching if you can just explain for this interview is your thoughts and process on that. Your coaching philosophy would have had impact. From my point of view, I was still playing, and I was still young, but you encouraged young adults where it was possible with the restrictions of when you could coach. You actually made us coach you got us onto the coaching pool.

SK I have probably still got a folder here, because it was a great programme. It was the first national coach development and what is UK Coaching now. A national coaching foundation led this programme. It was a coach education programme, putting on 20 hours of coaching, but essentially, it was a coach development programme. We would have mentor coaches and we would have an opportunity of developing coaches below that, so I think the coaches that came out; Keith Williams who became a referee, Clive Allen, Tony Simms, yourself [Kevin Henry], Gordon, Wendy Smith, Elaine White who are still around playing for GB Masters now. Our determination was to look at changing the stereotype of why it is male coaches and looking at young coaches who had an experience of playing but could also be great role models. Dave Waite was another and Paul Virgo up at Great Barr and Clive took it on and ran a coaching business for many years providing coaching in schools. Tony Simms, gosh, they were both BBL Championship Winners, I think he is still a teacher over in Telford and others went on and coached and it was like right how do we develop Birmingham basketball with young coaches who can more readily connect with the youngsters of Birmingham rather than an old middle-class boy like me. I have never had an inner city experience and I think that made a difference. Moving from that, that spawned the Quality Cats junior programme and also fed directly into the Bullets programme and I think identified some guys some players that were just outside of that Bullets programme and gave them an oomph to get in it. We actually changed the national model because it was supposed to be 2 hours for 10 weeks and we ran some like 1 week 20-hour camps. Gosh that really takes me back!

KH Champion coaching was great.

SK Rob Palmer was involved through that as well.

KH Oh look what you have done to him, he has become something totally different now.

SK When I worked for Birmingham and developed a club accreditation programme and I was determined to, as we had some money from the Birmingham Sports Advisory Group was to support clubs and Rob was running a club down in Selly Oak I can't remember the name something Cougars?

KH Norton Cougars?

SK Cougars, well Rob, was one of the first clubs along with Paul Virgo in Great Barr, he is still, around isn't he? Rob was one of those that we gave initial support to, to developing their coaching and a guy called Paul Bannister that I think was with him. Rob went on and in fairness to him he has made a huge commitment to basketball and he was working in a bank somewhere down south. The City of Birmingham is the biggest community club in the country or something like that so gosh Champion Coachin has made a difference.

KH I told you at the start of the interview you have had a huge influence, not just on me you were being modest. One of the things this pandemic has done is given people time to reflect maybe to look at their own achievements. I would say from my point of view you have probably got a whole list of achievements that people would not achieve in their whole lifetime, but you probably always moved onto the next thing and that's what I wanted to talk about next. You went to the big job at Basketball England. Before it was called Basketball England it was England Basketball.

SK It was, England Basketball Association when I joined. I felt we rebranded and had that lovely logo with the ball coming out of it which we did in conjunction with Proctor and Gamble and

Gemma, the marketing person at Sunny Delight. We thought we were going to have 3 lions coming out, but they looked more like rabbits from Watership Down, so we went with a ball and it was great. I was quite pleased, and I didn't say anything, and we had that as a logo until about 5 years ago. I was quite proud Basketball England had that for 15ish [years] and it was synonymous it was nice. I think the difficulty with basketball back then we were trying to play big, the BBL was big and had got a good contract with Sky and with all sorts of sponsors Dairy Lea. We could never get the big guys like the FA can and I think we had a fair bit of conflict on the board at the time. My view I think, was we had got some Directors what were just about disrupting rather than actually moving things forward. I had a great group of people Alan Richardson who people might know way up in the North East, a referee just produced a book actually, Alan gave me a link into FIBA which is a bit of current work but there was a lot of civil war at the time and there wasn't really anybody big enough to step above it at the time. Betty Codona was a great chair.

KH Betty Codona was the Sheffield Hatters most successful coach in women's basketball for those that don't know.

SK I spoke to her a couple of weeks ago, still going, Vanessa Ellis is her daughter who is GB assistant coach still, I think, and a great family. I think we were fighting amongst ourselves and Basketball seemed to have a 4 year blood-letting of some sort and you could never get some direction. I know Steve, myself and the financial director all left within a month because we had had enough of fighting on our board. We knew what we were doing. Steve had put active sports on the ground that was going like mad and we saw a membership increase after we left. There were 17,000 members and it went up to 40,000 members and that was directly related to Steve and his work with Active Sports. We had put in a club structure we had done everything right, but the friction was always the need to fund the national teams and if you look at the national teams now, they always try to generate a couple of million we were running Men/Women/Under 20/18's 16's on about £150,000. I did a really good deal with the Ice arena at Coventry to play games there and we got hotel rooms free,

we got transport free and the venue free and that saved us about £30,000. We were always going hand to mouth, and finances were tight. I think, probably looking back on myself and Betty's strategy that we invested as much as possible. Which left us a little bit tight at times and I think that was the criticism of us at times, I think.

KH Knowing who you are, you had such a big influence on grassroots sport so for that to come across do you feel that was such a regret for you.

SK No not at all and you have hit on the conflict that there was at basketball. There was a conflict between investing in participation or investing in the international programme and where we were getting money from Sport England and money from Sunny Delight and from OBI that was for participation and that was our philosophical stance was where Betty was where some of the board was, but the international team/group wanted the money into the international programme so when they saw a million or 10 million as it was into the outdoor basketball they said what we could do with that but it was not for that. Where we wanted to go where Steve and I were driven and we would have steaming rows, Steve and I and he probably won 2 out of 3 to be fair. We knew where we were going; getting more people playing, better coaching, better environments, better facilities and Nechells we might touch on Nechells a bit, Nechells was part of that planning that we did back in the late 1990's. So that was the friction, we needed money into the international programme and it was no. Sorry. That was the membership money we had to generate that programme from the membership programme that was the friction. I do not regret that at all not one bit because I think and it wasn't me but the Outdoor Basketball Initiative and the programmes around that the National League structures, the club structures are still fundamentally the same as it was back when I restructured it in 2001. No, I don't regret anything at all.

KH Would you change anything if you could go back as a young Simon Kirkland that could go back in his DeLorean. Would you have changed anything?



SK I maybe would have tried to have done less. I was running at 100 miles an hour. Steve with the development team, which were a great driven development team. If we had appointed one less of those, we would have had a bit more funding to play with and maybe if we had been a bit harsher around the funding for the national teams' programme. I would have funded that a little bit less.

KH When you moved to your next venture, which was a bit different from what you had previously been doing. What made you want to do that?

SK Touching back on the facilities thing, what made me proud was that we had put a facility plan in, and Sport England was trying to encourage us to say well this was when the lottery had first come out and they said well if we can put 2 hours of basketball in will you approve it and I was saying; 'no, that won't make a difference to basketball'. What will make a difference to basketball is if we have 10, 20, 40 hours of basketball a week and we had heated discussions with Sport England and I actually got support in the end to say if we are going to make a difference let's have a dedicated centre. I can remember the discussions over in Nottingham with Jessie Boots Centre with Pauline and Chris Prior who were brilliant as well as Ian France way up in Barrow the John Amaechi Centre and Nechells and it was this is a dedicated basketball centre. It needs two courts it needs 40 hours of basketball to make a difference to basketball and in fairness to Rob he has grabbed hold of that, and he has made a difference. The quicker he actually runs that facility the better. So we did have a fundamental review of basketball in the last year of my life there because I was unhappy with the board. I felt they were working operationally not strategically. Following that review I didn't feel I could make a difference anymore and Steve and I left.

In 2002 I set up my company and initially didn't get any work with clubs but I did a load of work in governance and equality back then and ironically now we are working heavily with clubs now through the Club Matters programme. A lot of work on equality and equality standards for sport and we do a lot on governance and education training from my teaching background was really important. We have grown a whole education programme and supported governing bodies and challenged governing bodies about how they approach coaching. I was frustrated when UKCC came out that it was; 'oh your coaching session is warm up, drills, game and cool down' and my approach is 'games for understanding, game based, play the game', see what the problem is then coach it. Fortunately, we have convinced a couple of sports to go that way. Basketball is changing to that game-based approach and I have some great colleagues who I work with in the company. Brian Aldred is still doing a great job at Basketball England, still trying to change things. He does influence and it is changing. Basketball now have a board that is supporting Brian's approach.

KH Why do you think it has taken so long? In 2000 it was going in a positive direction.

SK Finance is tight, and my successor was an accountant Keith Myer, who did a great job of building a cash reserve. Then his successor spent it all I think but we were generating about £90-100K from coach education, which were putting back into the game it was free money for us to spend how we wanted to but with UKCC it changed the whole dynamic of income and the board got very nervous about that and therefore were reluctant to move forward. I think that they got pressure from the members who said it's too expensive to do coaching qualifications. There were moves to say you have to be a level 2 to coach at [junior] National League, you have to be a level 3 to coach at [senior] National League and there were financial prohibitors to that. They got nervous, now we have got that board that have seen that strategically and are moving it forward.

The pandemic has helped put it in context. We probably run about 4 or 5 level 2's [courses] a year in normal circumstances, we have had 15 at level 2 since April. We normally run 1 level 3 and we are on about 5. The pandemic has been great as it has made coach education far more accessible. We tried it before and people didn't want the online but now you have got to walk to your computer, sit down and do it. We have got some great tutors as well. Which is helping.

KH It seems you have learnt a lot and taken a lot of lessons learnt and structured - pardon the pun, your business to be that way. Within your team describe how your team are and how they work.

SK They are great, we have just changed our vision and they have got passion which just sums them up, integrity, excellence and togetherness we wanted solidarity but that spelt pies, so we stuck with togetherness. I have got a great fellow director Kath Robinson we have been together for 13 and a half years since she came out of university and just led the whole coach education stuff. I have got some really strong people in apprenticeships and I like to think we have a great reputation with apprenticeships, we don't cut corners. We are about excellence, that quality and some training providers some of the things they provide are very questionable. I have got people who have pride in their work and that is more expensive to provide and doesn't generate massive profits but that is not what we are about we are here to be socially conscious and change people by positive influence and positively influence their lives and give them an opportunity of developing.

KH The business itself has grown so much and has now become a big business, which is quite recognised in what it is. How are you achieving that? Where are you taking it in the next 5 years?

SK I say we will grow as a training provider we have looked at our apprenticeship programmes and people miss out on apprenticeships and we do what we call off pitch and on pitch. The on pitch - so coaching apprenticeships are steady our biggest client is Norwich City which is a long way to go but we also do management, leadership, digital marketing Looking at sports organisations and what will make a difference to them and that is where we are at. We are looking at people and organisations in this sector and how can we improve them. What we are good at is generating revenue for training for people to do training in a cost-effective way. I say we have strong integrity and ethics so the whole thing around addressing inequalities. Someone asked me what's your view as a white man who is getting on a bit, I champion women in the company, mentoring people to get onto the board of basketball. I am passionate about addressing inequalities and what racks me off about when I was working in Hollyhead, 30 odd years ago, the issues were around housing, criminal justice system, representation and empowerment the same now it's, education it's the same and it is about being valued. We had a discussion about quotas so on Sports Governing Body boards there should be a proportion from Black and Ethnic Minorities now 5 years ago I was no let it evolve. Now quotas will force change which has certainly done on the gender side and I am delighted to see Sadie Mason on the board at Basketball England. That change has got to be driven. I have never been let down by anybody from any group or organisation and Steve Nelson is a great example, he just wowed us at interview, and he was the first black guy who was a national development officer for a governing body. He was brilliant he has been director, a chief executive of a sports partnership and Sadie has. You look at the representation of around 46 active partnerships there are 4 from ethnic minority groups. No chief executives so still, loads to do.

KH On a side note, I think our YBL board is the most diverse board that I have with staff members that I can probably think of. If you look at everyone's background but to be fair, we didn't realise until we were talking about it, we didn't realise it was that diverse.

JD Simon do you want the stats.

SK Yeah

JD Six board members. 40% BAME, 40% female, 20% LGBTQ+ and 60% White British. Our staff 30% BAME, 50% female 22% with a disability and 11% LGBTQ+.

SK I think the challenge that I had in basketball and other wider organisation is that it was a bit like the gladiators. It is okay that those guys are down there playing or beating each other up but we don't want them in decision making positions. Football have got the same challenge, I think. Well a black person can they be trusted? Of course they can and I just find that quite staggering and Boris Johnson has kicked the BLM thing down the road, there was supposed to be a report on that last month, there is

someone leading the review but there is enough stuff you look at the report on the criminal justice system, the Lammie report and George Eustace came out and said the Millwall fans they have a right to boo? Let's grow up! That's the worry that this leadership, is not going to change anything. The FA as the leading sport have done a load to try and change things and they get quite lambasted, but they are doing loads. Every governing body should be. It's a subject I get very passionate about because I know as a white middle-class person, I have been very lucky, and the shaping of my life was at Holyhead in Handsworth where people were unfairly discriminated against.

KH The reason Holyhead was different, it accepted anyone even if you were not from that area, they would give you an opportunity.

SK There were two basketball clubs there at the time one was Holyhead and the other was Oaklands and Holyhead was predominately white guys who drove in to play on a Monday night and Tuesday night was Oaklands who were local. After a year we only had Oaklands!

KH In all of this. Have you felt that you have learnt a lot? What advice would you give to someone new coming into basketball?

SK Learn from those that have been there, Rob Palmer and Kirk Dawes fantastic role models down at City of Birmingham. Be yourself and develop a working partnership. I think one of the things about Birmingham basketball was that it was brilliant at infighting. There are still new things to learn in coaching new approaches but there is a lot that has been done. I had a fantastic conversation with Haj Barnier who is the GB wheelchair basketball coach, and it was the most enjoyable hour I have had talking about coaching for ages. He is talking about preparing for tournaments which is fundamentally different from preparing for games. You don't know everything ever. Learn and we have evolved as a company and evolved basketball and we learn from our mistakes. What Jordan says he has made more mistakes than he has ever scored so don't be afraid to try things.

KH This pandemic has changed things and if I wanted to do something in sport what would you advise someone to do?

SK I think I regret stopping playing earlier than I wanted to. Football, basketball and cricket. I would play as long as you can but if you want to go into coaching or volunteering you can certainly make a mark and if you want to go into basketball you can make a difference. There is a real need for people to engage in the sport. You mentioned the profile of your board and your staff, but have you got enough volunteers? I don't think anyone has enough volunteers, so that the opportunity is there.

KH Tell the readers something about you that no one knows.

SK I worked on Birmingham Hospital radio but I got so fed up of playing Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin, and having to go in 2 hours before the programme so I gave up. I used to play the cello as well which is very middle class!

KH Hospital Radio sounds very interesting how long did you do that for.

SK It was only 2 or 3 shows, I was a night club DJ so for those that remember Faces and Maximillian's and the Elbow Room I used to DJ those.

KH I don't think many people would have known you were a DJ.

SK I know I did the Elbow Room for quite a while and Roy Wood who was in Wizard made me a sandwich once, now that is my claim to fame. I was saying earlier probably the thing that I think when you are connecting with junior players, Craig Shakespeare who was a pupil, is now coach at Aston Villa, Tony Daly played for England was in the District Team and Darren Moore played at Holyhead, all I was involved with but I had no influence really over them they were talented people singularly determined to become professional footballers. I think sometimes that coaches sometimes get so wrapped up in the influence. The first football game I took as a teacher Craig was in the team and we lost 9-1 to Holte School and Mark Walters scored 5 for Holte. Coaches tend to be great when they have great players.

Thanks Kev that has been a brilliant trip down memory lane. 🍌





Officiating: The Non-Conventional Route to Professional Basketball

Everyone reading this article probably shares something in common, we all have a love for basketball. Every individual involved in our sport has their own story of how they first became involved and how they got to where they are today. I have had experiences of spectating, playing, coaching and officiating. It is officiating where I have found the most interest and I am currently a Level 5 Table Official and Level 3 Referee. I am a BBL Table Official as well as a Senior National League referee.

How I got in to Officiating... From a young age I have been watching the Worcester Wolves play and as I grew up, I started playing for Worcester Wolves Academy. Whilst playing I decided I wanted to learn more about the rules of the game and how they are applied to help with my understanding of the game. With thanks to Emma-Jane Gardner she encouraged me to complete my Level 2 Table Official course which I did early in 2013 and started officiating national league games straight away. I was enjoying the table officiating so much and I wanted to learn more, so I also completed my Level 2 Referee course later in 2013. Whilst I carried on playing for Wolves, I picked up more refereeing and table officiating alongside it. I owe a lot of thanks to my co-officials who supported me in my early days as I was (and still am!) continually learning. I am also very grateful to the coaches and clubs who asked me to officiate their games which allowed me to get experience, I look back on some of those CVLs with fond memories and I know they were what allowed me to learn and progress.

In the summer of 2013, I was watching the wheelchair basketball Continental Clash when they announced that Worcester had been awarded the hosting rights for the 2015 European Championships. It was at that exact moment I told myself in 2 years' time that is where I wanted to be with my officiating. I knew I needed to complete the Level 3 course, I needed more experience and more confidence but suddenly I had a goal to work towards.

The Journey... Officiating is a lot harder than it looks, and once you have a go at it you have a newfound appreciation for those in grey and red at all our games. Without those people, there would be no games. As players and coaches put the hours in away from games, so do officials. From fitness testing, to rules tests a lot of practice goes in to making sure we are 'game ready' just as the teams are. And similar to how teams go away and analyse the game tape to see how they performed; officials do this too. This is something I have found that has helped me improve a lot as you pick up things you hadn't realised, and you can see how to do things better. We also attend conferences, workshops and webinars with other officials to learn the latest information which helps us perform to our best.

After having officiated as much as I could, completing my Level 3 Table Official Course in July 2015 and having feedback on my performances, I received the email I had been waiting for. I had been appointed as a National Technical Official for the European Championships later that summer. As my first experience of international basketball at just 17 years old it was an incredible feeling as we walked out to the table on the opening night as GB faced off against Turkey. I had a very successful tournament including being appointed to the Men's Bronze Medal game between Germany and the Netherlands. Following the tournament, I was invited to join the BBL Table Officials group. Since joining the league, I have officiated all around the country, working with some incredible co-officials and getting to see top level basketball week in week out. I have been fortunate enough to be appointed to finals at the O2 Arena in London and Arena Birmingham.

My referee pathway started out with refereeing in the Gloucestershire Basketball League and doing junior CVLs in Worcester. The value of these games is so important, and we are now very lucky with how the YBL is growing that there are plenty of opportunities to gain experience (when COVID-19 isn't putting all our plans on hold!). As I got into my later teens, I started refereeing junior national league and BUCS games. These BUCS games taught me a lot as they are very different to junior and local league games and this is where I really started to learn the importance of game management. I particularly enjoyed refereeing the Varsity matches between Worcester and Gloucester as it was a party like atmosphere, but I needed a thick skin to block out the obscene chants that were coming my way. ↓





After moving to Cardiff in 2017 for university I was asked to join the Senior National League referee pool and have been doing games at this level since. The games can be incredibly varied, but they all teach you something new as no two teams match up the same. The importance of self-reflection was also highlighted to me here and it something I now do after every game. Thinking about these reflection questions really help you to improve because being critical of your performances will make you learn more from it. The work that goes in off the court is something that the players, coaches and spectators don't see but it is one of the most crucial elements that improves our officiating. I am still in the early stages of my refereeing but being aware of this is so important as it means I don't go to games with a 'I know everything attitude'. You can learn



so much from the people around you, not just co-officials but the coaches and the players. If we all work together, we can improve the game for everyone. I will continue to learn and develop, and I hope to continue my progression up the ladder and hopefully one day you might see me refereeing a BBL game.

The Most Frequently Asked Question...

Other than 'how was that a foul ref?!' the most common question I get asked by people is 'why do you enjoy officiating?' From the first game I tabled back in 2013 to officiating major cup finals and international games, I get the same feeling of excitement going into games as players do. I just love

the feeling of being involved in the game – the pace of the game and the unpredictable nature knowing either team can win on the night are two of the main reasons I love basketball.

As a table official you have the best seats in the house being right in the middle at half court and as a referee you are in the thick of the action for 40 minutes, every game. This means you get to see the game from a completely different perspective. I will never forget the feeling of refereeing on the baseline witnessing my first 'posterizing' dunk or the first game winning buzzer beater three-point shot or the countless games that go to overtime and are nail biters from start to finish. Each game is a different experience and different memory that all contribute to your officiating journey.

Another reason why I enjoy officiating is always getting to meet new people. Each game you go to you get to meet your co-officials, coaches and players and it is positive to watch those relationships flourish with the more games you do. As well as making friends across the UK I also have a global network of basketball contacts who I have met at different tournaments and I love catching up with them and seeing how their basketball journey is progressing in their country.

What Is Not So Great? Unfortunately, with officiating comes its fair share of criticism. As a Table Official you don't often get much 'abuse' but you are still an easy target for coaches, players and spectators if

things go wrong. For example, if the clock isn't stopped quick enough or you accidentally put the score on the wrong side you can guarantee someone will say something. Unlike referees, as a table official you don't have the power to award a technical foul and the referees have to deal with it.

As a referee, at every game there will be at least one person who is not happy with your performance. It is easy to use the referees as a scapegoat when things aren't going well, or you lose because you can easily think of the things that didn't go in your favor. I remember vividly when I was refereeing an U18s local derby and I was told by a parent "you are so bad that I hope you are giving your match fee to charity". As with players, no official turns up to a game wanting to perform badly and everyone is trying their best. This for me is the ultimate take away, everyone out on the court is always trying their best. Yes, things may not always go as planned but every game provides us with new learning opportunities.

There is a lot of pressure on you when you are officiating as each decision you make has an impact on the game which is why making the correct call is so important. As officials are coming through the ranks it takes time to adapt to this pressure and being able to perform under it. As basketball enthusiasts we should all be supporting our developing officials as we need them for the game to continue going forward. Something worth remembering is professional players did not get to where they are without making mistakes and it is the same for our officials. If a game finishes and you think you could have done a better job than the officials, sign up to take the course and have a go yourself because as I mentioned earlier, once you have had a go, you will have a newfound appreciation for the difficult task at hand.

To conclude, there are many reasons why I love officiating and have chosen to progress with it. But there have been times where you can be put off continuing because of the actions of others. However, I have stuck with it and I am so glad I have. When young ballers have a dream of being involved in professional basketball not many consider the alternative options beside playing. But this route is just as rewarding, and you still get the end result of being involved with professional basketball. I would encourage everyone to consider something alongside being a player. Whether it being officiating, stats, coaching or team manager, there is a valuable role for everyone in the sport and it doesn't necessarily have to be playing.

As well as officiating myself I have also started tutoring as I want to share my experiences and knowledge with other officials to help grow and develop our basketball workforce. As you carry on your own basketball journey if you would ever like to get in touch with me to ask questions, I am always happy to chat basketball and watch clips with people so we can all learn and improve. See below for my contact details.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and I hope our paths cross on a court very soon! ●





No gym - No problem!

The Covid-19 pandemic has created many problems but at the same time it has provided opportunities for you, the athlete, to work on areas you probably would not normally concentrate on.

There are so many drills and exercises available on social media that it can be quite overwhelming on what to do and for how long, so here are a few pointers on how to structure a home workout.

- 1) Choose what area you want to work on.
- 2) Break them down from the easiest to the hardest. Whether it be physically or technically.
- 3) Decide if you want to do repetitions of a certain number (e.g. 3 sets of 12 repetitions) or how many repetitions to do in a set time.

Here, I have chosen 4 technical skills that can also be used to improve your fitness levels. Each drill will last for 60 seconds and the aim is to complete as many reps or attempts as possible in the set time.


The more attempts you get in, the harder the workout. There are two ways to complete the circuit.

- (1) Do the same drill for 3-5 sets with a 60 second rest in between.
- (2) Then move to the next drill as soon as you complete a set, move on to the next drill and start as quick as you can.

If you choose option (2), your 60 second rest will start when you have completed all 4 sets. The aim is to work towards completing a 5 set workout in about 30 minutes.

Again, this could include core work, upper and lower body strength exercises or a combination of them all. The key thing is to have a plan of what you want to do and record it so you can see your progress. If you do not have access to a basket then aim for a target on the wall and shoot at that or choose another drill that will improve your performance once you get back on the court.

Our Building the Athlete remote coaching app is a great resource to use as there are over 600 drills and exercises on the platform to help you develop on and off the court. With our team of experts in Sports Psychology, S&C, Nutrition, Technical and Tactical analysis, we can create worklists for you and set your realist targets plus the push messaging allows you to speak to the coach directly if you have any questions or need pointers with your technique.

The drills on the right are taken from the All City Basketball YouTube channel and Building the Athlete app.  **ALL CITY CHANNEL**

Hope this provides some help and you can always follow us on Instagram through @allcityball.



Figure 8 Dribble  **PLAY VIDEO**



Euro Step Hops  **PLAY VIDEO**



Round the Waist through the Legs  **PLAY VIDEO**



Continuous Free Throw Line Jumpers  **PLAY VIDEO**

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Full Court catches up with CoB Leadership; Rob Palmer & Kirk Dawes

more
than
just a
club

Full Court sits down with Rob Palmer and Kirk Dawes from City of Birmingham Rockets Basketball Club to catch up with them and to have a good old chin wag! Rob and Kirk go way back. Sitting there watching them speak about their passion and friendship you can see the mutual respect they have for one another. Adding Kevin Henry into the mix was a delight to watch. The long history these three colourful characters have gave way to a wonderful and educational interview.

Kevin Henry (**KH**): Welcome to you both good to see you, it's really good to see you both.
Kirk Dawes (**KD**): I've been self-isolating since March 2020 so I've not gone outside since then, it has done my head in and it is what it is.

KH Rob, how you doing?

Rob Palmer (**RP**): Very good Kev to be honest, the lockdown has been hard for everyone, we have had so much going on from a work perspective it's actually been a bit of a silver lining for us, it has given us a chance to take stock of what we are doing and why we are doing it. What we are doing and what we need to do differently and look at some longer-term plans and we have managed to evolve a couple of partnerships and relationships that this time has enabled us to do. So that's been really positive but the downside of it is that we haven't been able to have the kids back.

We were quite fortunate to get back early so from mid-August we were able to go back inside we were through until early November and then we have been back in the last couple of weeks since the full lockdown has finished, and we are back to tier 3!

On a personal note, I got engaged during the period and got to spend more time at home with the kids which doesn't usually work for me, so we made the most of that really. So it's been good I just don't like the fact that my time out is limited, unlike Kirk who cannot go out and I feel for him. We speak every day, but I have to look at it in the most positive way we can. We can't influence the restrictions that we are all under, but we can influence how we respond to it.

It's about a positive attitude and that's the take we have across the club. Let's hope for a brighter 2021.

KH I hope so the only way is up isn't it.

KH How long have you guys known each other? How did you guys meet? Can you remember that far back?

RP We met on the court playing many moons ago - probably when I was in Norton Cougars in 1988 - There was a thriving West Midlands Basketball League at that stage. It had probably gone past its peak but there were probably still 7 or 8 divisions playing. It wasn't a young league it was an ageing league and from a school set up I think we played at a reasonable level but there weren't opportunities to get involved with teams and to be fair there were very talented guys playing at all those divisions and kids came along and it was like "we don't want those kids joining our club, or on the other side of that we didn't know where to go to find them so I think what I did was I contacted West Midlands Basketball League as a 16 year old and said what do I do to put a team in". I had a load of kids from all around the local area who I knew and wanted to play so we entered what it was at the time Division 4/5 and went from there and it was a 'Rosebowl' game where we played the Police and they knocked bells of whatever out of us. Kirk was playing for West Midlands Police at the time. They were a very established premier league side, I think we had a 90 point start on them and still probably lost which gave us some reality as a kid of where you are actually really at, compared to these experienced old timers. Always a dirty team on the court and always physical, but to be fair.

KH It was only their kit that was dirty! Their plays was outstanding!

KD Let me bring some semblance of order to what he has just said. Rob is right, I played in the West Midlands League from back in the 70's. What happened was by the time I joined the Police service we had a 15-to-20-year period because the Police were very involved in sport. We could build teams which you couldn't do today. With players who played professional or semi-professional in all sports. I played football, rugby and basketball for the police and you would be given time off to train and all the facilities and money you needed. By the time the West Midlands Police Basketball team in the 70's we were a 4th division team, but I was playing for other teams mainly in the Black Country and we were able to recruit a team with the likes of Kev Penny and Andy Nicholson and we were able to grab them even though they had a full-time



job. One of the things I would say about Police Sport and it didn't matter what you were playing, whoever we played came wanting to batter us because we were coppers. In the end we were just ready for people and so everyone thought we were rough. We were just trying to be nice and we were quite strong, and people had a particular view of me as a player and I don't dispute that. I hope that people realise that I am a completely different off court that when I am on court. That when you work on the field of play. Nobby Styles he played for Manchester United, wrote a book called 'Soccer is my Battlefield' and on the field of play sport is designed around war.

When you are younger yes, it's all about development but when you are older, it's all about the winning and so Rob is right, he was young about 17. I do remember him from them days. You know the 'Rosebowl', unless you're tough you are not going to win that. Your 90 points behind but in saying that really, I suppose if I am truly honest, I had heard about Rob. I had heard about his coaching, I had heard how great he was with kids. It was really my son Jordan Dawes who brought myself and Rob Palmer together. Jordan wanted to play basketball and we lived in Knowle, Solihull and its real leafy here and he wanted to play in Brum, and I kept saying No, No, No and he had heard about Rob about the City of Birmingham.

One day it was as simple as this I took him to the trials in 2008 something like that.

RP I think it was 2006/2007 he was 14 Kirk.

KD So, I took him, and I dropped him off and I didn't want anyone to know he was my son. He went into the trials and he didn't make it but what Rob did was he phoned up and he said he wanted him to come back on a Wednesday night, so I was taking him to the Wednesday night sessions, and I might occasionally watch from upstairs. One day I went downstairs, and Rob recognised me, and I recognised him and that was it really.

What I saw in Rob was that Rob played a really big part in my son's maturity over the years, helping him grow up from the field of sport to what he does now. I consider Rob one of my best friends, and I speak to him more than I speak to Deb [Kirk's wife].

The thing is what I saw then was everything that we in the police at that time were trying to do around kids, interventions keeping them off the street and giving them something to build their character. It was taking place there at CoB. So, he invited me into the club when Jordan was 16. I had finished at Worcester and for me basketball was all over, he asked me to do a couple of years with the 93 kids and the rest is history.

RP, I think it was about 1988/89 that we first met and obviously over the years played against each other sporadically and in 2006-2007 I had a bunch of U14 kids when I was working at the City Council. It was a Sport England funded project called Active Sports and it was a 4-year post. There was the Bullets junior programme and we had worked on that together and the Bullets senior programme had just really reached its demise and the junior programme went with it. There was nothing in the City for the kids really. Full stop. The remit for the role was get basketball going. We had got this new centre that had just been built at Nechells which had got a Sport England remit of so much basketball use in it. Use that as a centre hub and see if you can build the sport up. It was aimed at [school] years 7 and 8. In my wisdom, we needed to look at U14 and a pathway to go through. That was how the club was born we entered U13 National League, I ran some satellite clubs around the city at various locations; Handsworth Leisure Centre, Bishops Challenor, Queensbridge, Bournville Secondary, Nechells itself and Great Barr. There was, in that batch, there was a legacy within that programme. Miles Hesson went on to be GB captain, I picked him up at Great Barr when he did a school session one day he was with a bunch of lads, Antoine McKellar, Ashley Taylor, Ashley Priddy just your standard group of kids who wanted to play more. Come along to a Saturday and we had got a central venue league (CVL) running and put yourself against some other kids and that was it. Kofi Josephs was another attendee I think he attended other sessions around the city he was 10 at that time and took part in the CVL. There was some real talent and then fast forward to 2005-2006 and we had got this group of U14's I had been to final 4's with them a real good set of tough kids really and we then had them U15. We traditionally held trials in early June time and generally as you know managing a group of 15/16 in a squad is challenging.



Financially, I want 15/16 in a squad, but a coach wants 12 so you have to look at that. Kirk and I have this conversation a lot and it's how you manage those kids; you create an environment where even if they are not playing games they are improving and you're consistent and you're fair you can have those bigger squads at a younger age. Jordan came and attended trials and another kid, Arron Withe. Arron was 6'5" Centre. He would snap up rebound after rebound. So always happens at trials, the hardest thing is sending them away if you can't offer them anything else. They have come to play basketball or they have an aspiration to and they must enjoy the sport if they are they and yet we know in teams we can only have so many we can't have 40 in a squad. At that stage we didn't have the capacity to be making 2nd, 3rd and 4th teams.

KH Was that from your experience in the Police that you knew where to go in that direction or was that from running other clubs like Worcester and Solihull.

KD I think that life is an amalgamation of everything yeah! We tend to compartmentalise things and say that has got nothing to do with that, but it has. I think that there was the social side, there was the community side, which is a big thing, I was lucky, I had run a company that had a huge amount of money going through it that was on behalf of the company authorities as well, so I had to get me head around it and up to pace around having a business and how you build it. Having Bill Heaps who was a banker was phenomenal and helped us get our heads around it. When we decided let's look at this from a proper business footing, you knew then that you needed somebody that was going to be working full time on it and the amount of hours that Rob puts into it and he had found the right woman and Justine stands for the amount of time - let's put it this way, Rob Palmer will be on the blower or sending a text at 7.30 /8.00 in the morning and the last one will be at 9 or 10 at night and even later if something has happened and that is every day. Even now we can't get him to take days off, he'll grab a few hours in a day.

What I am saying it's about having the right infrastructure around you that actually says that this guy here needs a bit of respite here. He actually went through a period within his life with his parents that we all go through but he still put the time in. He is still doing the stuff. When the jump came to 'do you want to be involved in all this' it was a no brainer and by that time all my family were thinking that and Jordan would never have forgiven me.

JD I can see that you are quite a close-knit group and the majority of people at the top end of CoB are the same with you. I have got a quick question to that with your personal experience of how you interact with people in your club. Do you have a specific person who has come through CoB and has journeyed through CoB or may in fact still be at CoB that is a success story that you base some of your ideas on, when you're looking at the next idea or what's the next best programme and do you base that on a kind of particular child or now adult?

RP Not one particular child James, the beauty for us is that the club is formed around relationships and the environment, the culture we try to create which has to come from me when I am managing the volunteer workforce or the coaches whether they are getting paid or not managing that environment. We could use a number of players who have come through the programme and have got education whether that be in the States (USA), or playing in Europe but what is just as important for me is the kid that has come through and become a police officer or is now teaching or has just done something positive in their lives and maybe they start giving that potential. It's about realising someone's full potential and how we can we make something for them to make them realise their full potential in life. If we are doing that the basketball development of their skills is one thing and obviously, we work really hard on the programme to try and evolve that and give them their opportunities. It is that personal support for me that is crucial, it is where the model runs for us and we have one or two things that we try and do to encompass that which even now we are changing things that happen on the basketball floor that encourages kids to make their own decisions because they are life skills, which are transferable. We try and run it around that in short James and just going back to what Kevin and Kirk were talking about previously there, the support I get in being able to do it. At the start it is around those people that you have got around you at the club and at home. I am fortunate that I have a partner that buys into what I do, she comes to watch and support what I do, and she is quite happy but for me I don't see it as a job I see it as a vocation it's my life and I am very lucky to be paid I'm not a 9-5 person...

JD I totally agree with you there Rob.

KH Was that the turning point for you 2015 if I had a graph and I was plotting the years 2003/2006 there was a leap there then 2006/2010 listening to what you have said. Then from 2010 /2015 there was a lull and from 2015 there was a change.

RP I wouldn't say lull Kev, I would say there was a period of stability for us and looking and reflecting at what we were doing and what we were doing about it. 2015/2016 was transformational.

KH 2010 to 2015 what was going on from your point of view, what direction did the club go.

RP I think we had reached a point where the club had grown and I think there was a period where the growth of the organisation had outgrown its structures.

KD Very quickly.
RP Very quickly.
KH Quicker than you expected.

RP Not quicker than I thought but quicker than I was able to manage successfully and I bought Dougie in to oversee the playing programme so that was the first time we had a programme coordinator that wasn't me. I was trying to be all things and it wasn't a case of appointing myself it was the way it had grown. Dougie came in and gave us that overview and that part was very successful also during that period it was also our first stab at a senior team in the National League.

KH So did he have a lot of influence? I think a lot of people know Dougie (Paul Douglas) He has a lot of experience doesn't he?

RP He has a load of experience we would meet weekly for meetings and we would try things and if it didn't feel realistic we wouldn't try it. I have nothing but good things to say about Dougie and his time with us. He then got offered the 'Knights' job and that came along and he done 4 years with us and as I said it was our first stab with a senior team so that gave us a taste of what that was about. We had started a girls programme back in 2011 so lots of things happened in that period. I think biggest influence for me now looking back and the learning point for me was being around the right people and developing the right people as well. Lots of people are there because they want to be there and put the time in but then you really have to judge about their skill set. We got them in the right place to deliver a really good product. We got to 15-16.

KH It was all change then?

KD It was about what the product was. It's the product what we have got that we say we are delivering to our customers. The customers are the kids, the parents and the like and have we got the infrastructure around all of it to make sure that it can run, that it doesn't just wash its face. That you can build on it and there is an element there that you have to say to yourself what is ownership and what part of this ownership am I willing to either relinquish or indeed to share and have courage to take risk because without the courage to take risk and that is the courage that we have and without courage in business you don't go anywhere. What happened then was as I saw it that when we sat down and spoke about it, we were actually saying to ourselves what does a board look like for a company that is growing like we are and then it's about recruiting the right people.

RP I back track a year or two Kev to answer your question and the growth and what I am trying to get at is with the wrong people are not bad people I am not by any stretch trying to say that. Every person has put time in at the club over the years we have had some phenomenal people they have all been great people and they have done it for all the right reasons. What happens is though (and Kev you will know this going back to our experiences at Bullets) we coached as we knew, you do that naturally through life, what your experiences are and what you have seen done. We go an Under 15 team it needs a coach - so and so wants to be a coach - they can coach off they go. So and so is coming in and he wants to be a coach - we need an U13 coach - yeah he's good we will have him lets go. He has played at a good level and before you know it you have 5 or 6 coaches all doing their best but going in different directions and working in different ways and what I knew I had to do was to provide some leadership. I like to let people operate in their own sphere and operate in their own freedom and in hindsight wasn't leading them as I am now bringing them together. They are working, putting the same energy and effort in but we have more support around them and guidance upon how this is going to be. I hate the fact of dictating and I never want to be that way, but we have to have some cross club principles to ensure things work in the right direction. I think that is what we have managed to do now.

KH Did you learn that from experience, or did you see that from other things, how did that come across?

RP That came from experience. It also came from spending some time with some of our partners overseas. We went to Spain and spent some time with Daniel who is a primary school teacher, a very funny system over there you get appointed as a head teacher by being voted in by your colleagues. If you want to do that you put yourself forward. He has stepped back and is just a regular teacher again but for a year or two was a head teacher. Daniel was a translator for Spain in the 2012 Olympic games, so his contacts in Spain are like top drawer and he contacted us out of the blue,

and I responded to that. Kirk and I went over, and we stopped at his house. He took us to meet the staff at Valencia Club in the ACB, Murcia ACB that was where Ovisoko was playing at the time, so we got to meet the players afterwards. He took us to a club in Alicante itself that was local they were and ex-league club that had gone into liquidation very similar to the Bullets and a couple of ex-players had decided that they were going to relaunch them. They started them off in the equivalent of our National League Division 4 and now they are on their way up and are now in the second division. Spending some time at the club then and looking at their bigger structure and plans was a bit of an eye opener. I had seen some things before and gone I do like to look at stuff and study stuff but until you see something in action on the ground it sometimes hard to get a feel for it and the reality of it. Looking at the way they were running their plans and the more you look the bigger clubs in Europe how they run the top development clubs they have got structures that run the whole way through. So it was common sense that we needed to get that done and it was a big, big, big piece of work to do in deciding what our priorities going to be, what principles are we going to adhere to what are the standards that we want from coaches, players, spectators, parents because over the years it had been hit and miss and like any other club we know we had had change and would continue to have challenges there will always be something that pipes up but we have now got structures in place that can deal with it now a lot more effectively than previously. So that was a little bit of a turning point and going back to what Kirk was saying about the board, Akeem arrived in the country in 2015 contacted us out of the blue, we are very lucky and we thank our lucky stars every day that we got an NBA Hall of Fame Legend contacting us.

KH Not many of those walking around.

RP But at the same time we met him, we spoke to him, we invited him to come along and see what was going on one night. He had a look and he said I would like to bring my boys down they have never touched a basketball. We said come down on another night. Kirk is all about that and can probably tell it better than I can. We can tell them what we do, we can show the web site and our social media, but we don't have to fabricate anything that we have got the diversity is there and the numbers are there, and the engagement is there. He couldn't believe it when he came along, he didn't think anything like that would be happening in this country the amount of kids that we had. His boys started getting involved and he wanted them to get a feel for the game without him pushing them into it and one of them was a big soccer player as he put it.

KD They had never played before.
KH They had never picked up a basketball that is interesting.
RP No, they had never picked up a basketball in their lives so at the time they were.





the YouTube clips. It was amazing really and told us a lot about Akeem and the person that he is.

Now they are a little older and a little more developed now he drives them on a bit more and two of them are over in Houston [USA] now they wanted to get them over early and there are three left I imagine two of them might move on by the end of the year they are already badgering their dad about that. He does believe that the speed of the game in the States is much quicker and he wants them there. He is ever thankful that the kids that have gone we helped prepare for the next part of their journey whatever that may look like. Akeem's arrival put a lot of focus on those immediate aspirations and where we could take them.

KH Who has influenced you the most in the sport then?

RP My early days from when I started playing was Neville Hopkins who used to run the session as the old BAI. I was 14 or 15 and Nev was still playing at Bullets so when you see someone then playing at that level on a Saturday night at the Villa Leisure centre and the atmosphere was electric. That's what the kids miss today. If they can see a high-level team playing and have something to aspire to.

JD So you are saying 5-10 year's time Rob, CoB are going to have a BBL team?

RP I will say this I would love to see a BBL team in the city and if we are a gateway to making that happen or part of anything to happen that would be phenomenal but wouldn't we all like to see that in the city. The city needs that and deserves that. There is still a lot of players and officials that come out of the city.

KD You have got to do it right and part of having a BBL franchise is how well it fits into whatever their development arm is and what their relationship will be with any of the other teams in the area. I think a lot of people would like to see a BBL team parachuted into Birmingham but unless it is attached to something already in existence and I am talking about a really good development arm then really it is just going to be a team and what you will end up with is and it is like you see in a lot of other sports, like Wasps in Rugby where you drop it in the middle of Coventry and expect it to be all things. Whatever BBL franchise comes here has to have the family environment feel, like that of the Birmingham Bullets had and we have seen lots of attempts to do that that have failed straight away and you don't want that it has to be right in every single way to get it done. There will be a BBL franchise here in the next 5 years, but I don't know how that will be. If you see some of the 2000 seat stadiums like Leicester and Worcestershire, I have been in them when there have barely been 800 people in them and that is what I am on about. The government money that is available to build a 2000 seat stadium, but you actually run it and fill it. Leicester is in a good position because they don't actually own that like people think but they have been given the remit to manage it and that might work. Worcester doesn't belong to Worcester it belongs to the Uni and they can't even train in there so it has got to be right whatever it is it has to be a home.

KH The closest thing to that is Newcastle.

KD That's what Rubeleski had and I only got to work with him with Dave Fisher and Pete for a year when the likes of Silk and Barnes were a kid, but it was very much a family feel and that is why Manchester have gone down and up because they have bought a family feel to it to basketball. I think the family feel is here with CoB at the moment but you have got to keep thinking it was this our aim, is this right for us and what benefit is it to what we have already got. Our board as you can imagine keep us in check. They don't play around.

RP The question we always get is what our core function is and are we sticking with that. Going back to your question Kevin three major influencers for me Neville Hopkins was that one to get me into coaching having a really positive attitude and being a really stand-up guy to recognise this guy I say playing on a Saturday night who was a superstar. He was a normal guy. He was such and still is a lovely guy. Pete Mintoff then starting me off on my coaching path



and teaching me the ability I have within myself. He opened up some opportunities to travel overseas and see things in a different perspective and then more recently Kirk Dawes who has been a sounding block a support mechanism, he is a friend a mentor I think Kirk has filled every role you could wish to have in somebody, and we don't agree on everything but we chat it through and we come forward on a compromise and that's the way it has to be. He hears my opinion, and I will hear his and we discuss it we might argue at times but eventually what we will do we come to an agreement and we come through the doors with a unified response to whatever we are doing and that is important as well. Kirk has become one of my best friends over that last 10-12 years.

KD Yes, he is my best mate the big thing is this when you think about your youth and I was in my 30's when you were young and playing how does that become best mates where you can literally say anything to them. When we do disagree, and we do disagree on some things on maybe the way we want to run it, but we know somewhere along that line we both need to find compromise and something that we can both live with. As Rob says once we find that we will live and die on that together and that is what we have done and I think that's one of the things the board absolutely understand when we go to them with something but even with the board we are very much willing to listen to understand rather than just a reply and that is the thing that I would say to anybody when they look at us because I understand things that are said about CoB that we want to take over the world just like they do about the YBL. I'll be really honest with you because that's the type of guy I am, because people will say these things about your organisation not knowing full well who you are and what you are attempting to do, and the truth of the matter is this. If you can get up in the morning and you can say to yourself that I am going to something well for someone else today which is how I think Rob lives his life which is well in keeping

with mine and it must be that way given the way you have built the YBL. This is what this life is truly about and as much as Rob will call me a mentor, he is to me. The problem with life is that we all think that our mentor is that older geezer well it's not it's about people you can learn from and learn to understand. Which is why like Rob, I adore this game, and I have my view on coaching and want to go back to it and do things in that way, but time moves on and you learn from those that are younger than you and have the measure of what today looks like.

All I can say is for me this Lockdown; what it's done for me it's given me a purpose the whole length of it, so I haven't sat at home feeling bored or anything like that because every single day that I get up I know that there is something that we have got to do for this club. I know that if there is something that we have to do for the club that it is going to go to the kids and anybody else involved in it. I know like when we get off this call there is a number of things waiting for us Rob as you can see.

KH You are not going to get away with that what do you think is your biggest achievement and who has helped you achieve this.

KD I think that there are different achievements through different parts of your life. My greatest achievement in life is my family. If you are talking about sport it's CoB, Rob invited me and involved me and when somebody has something which is really theirs and they invite you into their house and into their home, allow you say things that you want to about it, sport wise it's CoB definitely. I can look back at who I have played with, who I have known and all of that sort of stuff but sport it has been CoB. Work life well a job is a job, I went to the Palace if you are going to talk work life, I was lucky.

KH I see the countless hours that you do, and I am sure the kids appreciate everything that you do.

RP The biggest buzz I get is when you get kids come back from the past and thank you for the difference that you made in their lives really. That's more than money can buy.

KH I was there one pre-Covid game at the RAF one when one kid came up to you and he knew that I knew you and he just came up to you out of the blue, because you hadn't seen him since he had been at school. He was a massive grown man now with muscles and could probably pick us both up.

RP On one hand it is so fulfilling it gives you an amazing buzz but on the other makes you feel really old. We just want to get through this and get back to a new normal whatever that is going to be.

JD I would like to ask one further question for us to finish on each of you. What would be your closing statement and is there anything that you want to say to me and Kev in the formal capacity of CoB and us as the YBL.

RP I think for me first we really value what the YBL do and we have every intention in the future of working with you. It is good to see from our perspective that we see that your organisation is moving forward so I can see some synergy and I can see some opportunities in the future where we will be working more together and Kev's conversation that we had last week about officials and some joint working on that is going to be a positive one. I think it is exciting times for basketball within the region and I think that we are better positioned as a city or an area than I think we have been for a while.

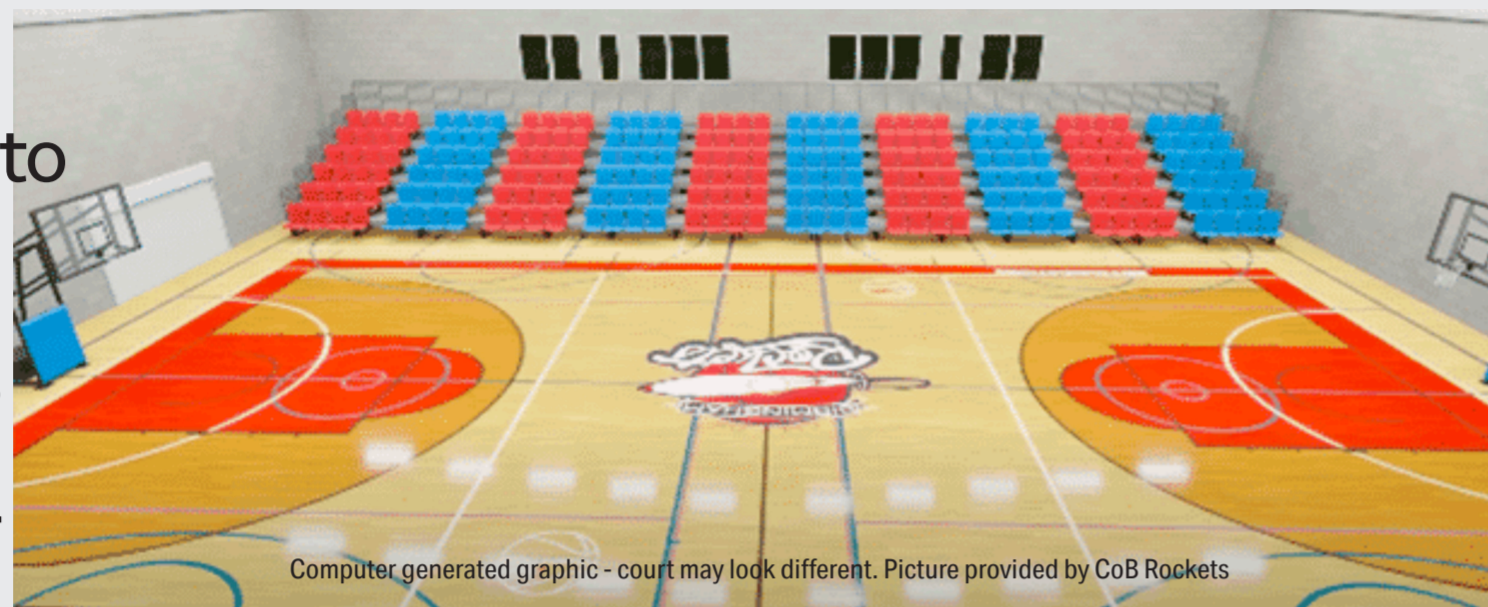
KD I echo what Rob has said the YBL is a very important part to basketball not just in the region but whether people look at it and think from a national point of view we can enhance what we do elsewhere and obviously they would come to you guys as experts on that. You know youth basketball in terms of the regional content before the YBL was missing out on a lot to be honest.

What I would say to all of this basketball community is that life is all about compromise what you can live with. We are grateful that you have come and spoken to us and our story will get out and people will make their minds up reading what has been talked about. 🍌



CoB Rockets await launch of new court

2K Foundation approaches City of Birmingham Rockets to rejuvenate Nechells Wellbeing Centre, home of CoB Rockets to the delight of directors; Rob Palmer and Kirk Dawes.



Computer generated graphic - court may look different. Picture provided by CoB Rockets

With any major refurbishment or rejuvenation project there comes a lot of planning, time and effort for the finished product to come to light. This is no difference when the American owned 2K Foundation approached the powers that be at City of Birmingham Rockets about sprucing up CoB Rocket's home court at Nechells Wellbeing Centre, in Birmingham.

The process of the application with 2K for the funding was of relative ease, Rob Palmer and Kirk Dawes provided the content for the application to 2K U.K. "We feel very fortunate they approached us. We were ready for it when it came. If we weren't, we wouldn't have been able to take it on. Their team were positive from the outset about what we did. Not for a minute did we think we would be successful. It was just, let's get it in and see what happens. We all know you put application form in and cross your fingers." Rob Palmer starts. "Everything in life deserves a modicum of luck, but if you're not prepared when it lands you don't get anything. I think what Rob is saying we were ready when that phone call, well the email came in. Let's remember this as well this is the first time that they have gone outside the United States for an application and obviously the first one in the whole of Europe and there was already a lot of work being done in the USA with the like of Lebron [James] and Anthony Davies who were behind some of the stuff over there. We had to do a lot of research to put it together? They put the paperwork in but we had hours and hours of conversations." Kirk Dawes concludes about the application process.

CoB Rockets and 2K were looking to have a big launch and a whole set of games to celebrate the conclusion of the refurb. However, due to the current restrictions, it might look like a small media and club launch, a soft launch and then when things return to the new normal a more public one. "We will have a day, things are being done, the lights are already done, they were a priority. We have got to get the floor down and the seating and goals. So, at the moment we are doing all the work around that but in truth, I think it is going to be March before we have this opening. We will want something done so there will be a good day of basketball. It has all come together, it's all there now that this is what we have built. We have to talk with 2K about what they want because they will want some type of show day. I think the kids all deserve it and we will get all our alumni back for that day." Kirk informs us.

The 2K Foundation and City of Birmingham Rockets worked closely with Birmingham City Council to make this happen. The centre will still be run by the local authority.

"We really appreciate this and all I can say is when the court is complete it is going to look like nothing else in this country." Rob Palmer says.

With a show court like Nechells being in Birmingham. It will put Birmingham back on the Basketball map. It will not only help CoB Rockets but the wider basketball community. There hasn't been a venue like this in the region since the demolition of Aston Villa Leisure Centre. It gives people a central place to watch their favourite sport and continue the electric atmosphere you get from games being played in a venue like this. "I think it is going to create a small sized arena for Birmingham that you can put games on. The city has something that people will be really proud of. I think it needs to be something that Birmingham is focussed on and the focus for our club and the West Midlands basketball community." Kirk concludes.

The show court, when it's finished, will be a pinnacle part of the the basketball community in Birmingham. It will give the players on court that little something special! It also helps developing officials.

"We wish that we had a fairy godmother that would drop us a 2-million-pound stadium like at Worcester or Leicester but in the meantime until that happens we are providing a facility for kids to come and play." Kirk Dawes states.

"What it also does for the whole region it gives not just players and coaches but officials a new dimension so you know we are going to have 24 second shot clocks but we are going to have the LED lighting on the boards which will be something new for officials to be working with. With the three-man [refereeing] opportunities that wouldn't be available anywhere else.

"We see a way of developing young officials as well in the future and give them experiences that they have to go out of the region for now.

"Massive positives there, going back to when we were young, when we played on a high-profile court whether it was before a BBL final or a big game somewhere you know the buzz that gives you and you can't buy that anywhere that experience. We know it's not going to be a huge arena but it's going to be a mid-size arena that we haven't had in Birmingham. It is a step in that direction." Rob Palmer concludes.

It will be a momentous day, in the near future, when we have the re-launch of Nechells Wellbeing Centre and a show-case day for CoB Rockets.

Kevin Henry
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FINALLY



HOW ARE YOU?

Douaine Anderson - Team Wolverhampton Slam
Considering the impact on basketball (and amateur sport in general) we at SLAM! Basketball are trying hard to use the downtime away from the court to maintain the engagement of our community club members and academy students. By utilising social media and other digital media platforms, we have tried to keep our members actively involved in their basketball development and focused on using this time to improve their skills through the lockdown.

Karen Goodrich - Northants Basketball Club
This is a very strange time indeed and our Basketball Centre is feeling really empty. We are missing the sound of bouncing basketballs and seeing all our players. Stay safe everyone and we hope to see you all very soon.



Northants' empty court!

We feel as though the pandemic has forced us all to adapt and use technology more creatively and efficiently, through online skills sessions and challenges. We feel as though lockdown has put us in a great situation to think more creatively about how we develop basketball moving forward. But we will also be very grateful to get back on court and do what we do best.

Kevin King - Shrewsbury Storm
1. WE ARE MISSING THE COURT!
2. We understand that it needs to be safe to return to play. Looking forward to next season, whenever that is!
3. Can't believe it's been a year since our last games!

Matt Coles - Stourport Spartans
Stourport Spartans are doing quite a lot to keep the juniors engaged. We are doing regular quizzes, including; a NBA quiz, rules of basketball quiz etc, these are being done on Zoom. We are also doing WhatsApp Group challenges where an age group has to post a video every night of them doing the challenge. The club is also doing player profiles on Facebook everyday for the entire club. And also using the time to get bids/grants, and sponsor letters done and sent out.

Chris Gibbs - Bromsgrove Bears
The Bears are all online or working on drills at home trying to cope with this extended lockdown as best we can. Everything is in place for when we can restart including provision for additional sessions to give the young people back some of the time lost over the past ten months. We wish everyone across the YBL all the best during this very difficult time and hopefully we will all be able to get back to the sport we love later this year.

Lloyd Taylor - Nuneaton Predators
We are surviving, staying ready. Before lockdown we just got our new personalised kits for our players which they love and cannot wait to use, and we have just started running Zoom theory sessions for our guys to keep them learning for when we are finally able to get back on the court.

Liam Sheridan - West Brom Basketball
We are alright, doing abit of work off court -keeping everyone engaged. Encouraging players to work out and to keep safe, healthy and fit. A few projects in the works that our young leaders are running.

Steve Mroso - Team Birmingham/Bournville Bears
Hope all is well?
Its been a shame with what's going on but health comes first to our members. Bournville Bears partnered up with Team Birmingham to include grassroots/local league alongside performance level which would have started this season. The memberships and teams were in full affect but due to the pandemic having on and off training sessions and hopes of a season to take place has made it difficult to keep our members engaged throughout this time.

James Robinson - Frankley Falcons
We miss the game and being together. It's been such a long time since our basketball family has been whole. We hope everyone is staying safe and look forward to the day we can do what we all love once again.

Claire Relf - Coventry Tornados
Here at Coventry Tornados we miss our basketball family. We are all missing the training, court time, coaches, team-mates and dedicated volunteers, but by following the government guidelines and staying safe, we will all be back together very soon. The pandemic has been challenging for all, be it mentally, physically or financially, but these challenges can serve to make us stronger and more determined to succeed. We look forward to what the future has in store!

Beth Matthews - Lasers
I hope everyone is keeping safe and fighting fit. It's been a year since the basketball season halted again. Missing the court and competitive action, training, debriefing the socialising and YBL basketball family. Hope to see you all at some point in 2021.

Rob Palmer - City of Birmingham Rockets
This has been a tremendously difficult time for everyone and we have of course missed the enjoyment our sport provides on a daily basis. However, we are all keeping positive here at CoB Rockets to ensure that when we are able to return to the court we are ready to do so safely and successfully. We look forward to seeing all of our friends across the basketball community in the near future. Stay safe everyone!

James Hancock - Cheltenham Chargers
We are staying positive and hopeful. We have mastered Zoom so can overcome anything!

GET IN TOUCH WITH FULL COURT

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Have you enjoyed this issue?
Has one article stood out to you?
Have you any thoughts on the topics covered this issue?
We'd like to hear from you. Send us a quick email or DM to one of our socials with your comments.

FINALLY WE WANT TO KNOW...

What are you looking forward to when we return?

Coming March 2021 in Full Court

Douaine Anderson
Team Wolverhampton Slam



Liam Sheridan
West Brom Basketball



Sam Neter
Hoopsfix.com



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In the Zone

Weekly news publication from the YBL



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SICK OF HEARING JAMES' VOICE? SHARE YOURS! REPORTERS WANTED SPREADING THE BASKETBALL LOVE

The YBL are looking for dedicated basketball lovers to report on their club activities and games. Writing about what their club does best. Who has achieved something special within their club. Received an award, or just gone above and beyond.

Do you have the skill for writing engaging articles or little nuggets of news?

Are you a potential writer that would like to get experience writing for Full Court? Are you a photographer that would like to share your basketball creativity or would getting your article published - would this help those already in education?

Please share your talents with the basketball world? We want to hear from you. Drop us a DM, email or give us a call.

What we are looking for;
In the Zone and Full Court Reporters

Enthusiastic people who love the sport, who like to get into, or continue their passion on reporting on the sport they love. We are looking for articles and news stories that have the edge; game reporting. Player, coach or official pre or post game interviews. Or a subject that matters to you involving basketball. For the YBL or beyond. It could be small nuggets of news or a full page article or opinion piece. Is this you?

What we are looking for;
Game Reports for our Social; including for our YouTube Channel

In front of the camera reports that would report on games across the YBL. These reports would be included within our YouTube videos and posted across our social media platform. Could you see yourself as a budding YBL Reporter?

For the budding professionals;

Potential writers for blogs, online sources and magazines can get vital practice and experience. Write up articles and submit to Full Court for editing for our next issue.



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