

A HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL LEAGUES.

6d : CROSS-BORDER RIVALRY, 1976-7:

Defending champions Turnford Tigers had left Pickett's Lock in London for the brand new facility of the Dacorum Centre at Hemel Hempstead. They now called themselves simply "Tigers", but League regulations insisted that every team must have a geographical location in its name, and so in all official publications they were referred to as "**Tigers (Dacorum)**".

The Tigers were clearly still going to be the team to beat, while their perennial rivals, **Cleveland Eagles** were expected to run them close again.

Another team on the move was **London YMCA Bobcats**, now sponsored by the same firm as the men's team. They (like the men) were awaiting the completion of the new Central London YMCA building, and it would seem that they may have played their matches at Milton Keynes, leaving **Southgate** as the only genuine London team in the competition.

A complicating factor, for those attempting to predict the outcome of the League, was the introduction of the three Scots team to the competition, with **Edinburgh All-Blacks** posing a particularly strong threat.

The season began with one match on each of the first three weekends, and unfortunately for the **Bobcats** they were involved in all three - against the top three English teams. Their first two defeats were narrow, as they went down by two at home to **Southgate**, and by a single point at **Tigers**, but they lost at home by 18 to **Cleveland**, and were already well out of title-contention, with an 0&3 start.

The first meeting of the "big two" came as early as the fourth week of the campaign, as the **Eagles** visited the **Tigers'** new lair at Hemel. Despite the absence of England International Annie Brown, Cleveland started strongly, with Ann Gollogly helping them to a ten point lead, and despite the efforts of Pauline Gardner and Andrea Warner the defending champions still trailed by seven at the half, 27 - 34.

The Eagles maintained their advantage to 47 - 54, but then Warner and Gardner added seventeen unanswered points for the hosts to put them ten points ahead. Cleveland fought back, with Eileen Moore taking her tally to 21 points, but with four players (including Gollogly) fouling out, the task was just too great for the visitors and Tigers ran out 72 - 69 winners to take pole position in the title race.

Corvus Cornix suffered from the absence of injured star Anita Curtis, and they began their campaign with a defeat, despite holding **Magnet Wicksteed** 16 - 17 in the first half. The Bobcats came good after the break, and the 42 - 52 victory gave them their first win of the season.

Injury problems beset **Southgate**, too, as they hosted the **Tigers** without Alena Golemberska, and though the home team led 18 - 14 a 24 point burst by the visitors put them in control at 18 - 38 on their way to a comfortable 49 - 71 victory.

Still smarting from their defeat at Hemel, **Cleveland** hosted **Corvus** at Stockton and took out their frustration with a 107 - 55 victory which set a new high-score for a Women's League match. Gollogly and Marian Millen posted 22 points apiece.

It was not until the sixth week that the Scots teams came into play, as **Boroughmuir** hosted the **Bobcats** and the **All Blacks** entertained **Cleveland**.

The Bobcats put on an excellent second half performance, holding the Aces to just eleven points after the interval, as they ran out 20-point victors, but Cleveland had a much tougher time in their game. The All-Blacks led 33 - 27 at the break, but the Eagles edged steadily back, to tie the game at 54 in the closing minute. Sue Preston, however, scored the basket which broke the English team's hearts as they found themselves with a 1&2 record!

Bobcats stayed in Scotland overnight, to take on the third Edinburgh team, **Polonia**, on the Sunday, but two wins in two days proved too much to ask, and the Scots recorded a 67 - 56 victory.

The league was already beginning to take shape, and when **Tigers** recorded back to back victories in Edinburgh on the pre-Christmas weekend, beating **All-Blacks** 50 - 55 and **Polonia** 65 - 76, they had confirmed themselves as clear title favourites.

Going into the Christmas break, Tigers had a perfect 8 & 0 record, while their nearest challengers all had two defeats - Eagles were 5 & 2, and both Southgate and Edinburgh All-Blacks 4 & 2. The Bobcats had three wins, but five defeats, to leave them in mid-table, while Polonia and Boroughmuir were both struggling (1 & 4 and 1 & 5 respectively), and Corvus Cornix were still looking for their first victory, having lost six.

The third week after the festive break saw **Southgate** visit the **Tigers** in the first key match-up of the run-in. The home side edged out to a 30 - 27 interval advantage, but the visitors took control early in the second half, to open a nine point gap. There was to be no upset, however, as Tigers steadied and with Rawson and Rogers fouling out the Wisps could not hold on as the champions edged home 67 - 59.

The **Eagles** and the **All-Blacks** remained neck and neck, as both continued to win until early February, when the Scots made the relatively short cross-border journey to Stockton.

This time the English team emerged triumphant, with a convincing 64 - 46 victory, and though the **All-Blacks** put up a stouter performance two weeks later, when they visited the Dacorum Centre, the **Tigers** edged to a 57 - 54 victory that put an end to the Edinburgh side's interest in the title race.

A home defeat, 52 - 61, by **Southgate** in mid-March confirmed that the **All-Blacks** would finish outside the top three.

The Eagles, with just two defeats, and the Wisps, with three, continued to win through February and March, but so, too, did the Tigers, and when the defending champions travelled to Stockton on the penultimate weekend the Eagles knew that only a victory, by more than three points, could keep their title aspirations alive.

The North-Easterners rose to the occasion, in a match which was made more complicated by the reluctance of both coaches to reveal their full strengths just two weeks before they were to meet in the Cup Final.

A six point victory for the Eagles, 67 - 61, was enough to keep the race open, though in reality they knew it would take a first victory of the season by Corvus Cornix in the final match of the campaign to deny the Tigers the title.

In the event that final game became an irrelevance, as **Southgate** gained revenge for their Cup semi-final defeat by the **Eagles**, by chalking up a 75 - 64 home victory over them on the final Saturday. That result not only handed the Tigers the title a day early (though they still duly beat Corvus, 58 - 75 on the Sunday), but also put the Wisps level, on three defeats, with the Eagles, and they snatched second place from Cleveland who had won the reverse fixture by ten!

Women, Division One							
		Pl.	W.	L.	For	Agt.	Pts.
1	Tigers (Dacorum)	14	13	1	993	779	27
2	Southgate TC Wisps	14	11	3	922	809	25
3	Cleveland Eagles	14	11	3	1023	796	25
4	Edinburgh All-Blacks	14	9	5	784	687	23
5	Polonia (Edinburgh)	14	5	9	816	825	19
6	Magnet Wicksted Bobcats	14	5	9	776	777	19
7	Boroughmuir Aces	14	2	12	666	944	16
8	Corvus Cornix (Cambridge)	14	0	14	696	1065	14

LEADING SCORERS, 1976-1977					
	Player	Team	League	Cup	Total
1	Eleanor PAYNE	Polonia	301	-	301
2	Andrea WARNER	Tigers	279	68	347
3	Ann GOLLOGLY	Eagles	266	98	364
4	Alena GOLEMBERSKA	Wisps	252	39	291
5	Pauline GARDNER	Tigers	194	44	238
6	Les MOWBRAY	YMCA	191	41	232
7	Anne UNDERWOOD	Corvus	188	16	204
8	Christine VINCE	Wisps	177	20	197
9	Gaye CLAPPERTON	Boroughmuir	157	-	157
10	Eileen MOORE	Eagles	149	66	215

Division Two

In Division 2 the teams played each other only once, but there was still a clear divide between the top three and the rest.

The concerns expressed when Rochdale had dropped out, that replacements **Radcliffe Wildcats** might prove uncompetitive, proved totally unfounded as they lost just a single game - at home to **Waltham Abbey**, 74 - 81, in early November.

The **Griffins** seemed well set to take the title, as they remained undefeated right through to late February, when they suffered a shock against **Avon**, in Frome, as the Wanderers picked up their sole victory of the season, 49 - 48.

That left the Griffins needing to win their last match of the season to clinch the title, and they must have had a nervous three week wait for that game, which they duly won 75 - 63 at home to **Nottingham**.

The Griffins and Wildcats thus both finished level, with one defeat, with Waltham taking the title courtesy of that victory at Radcliffe.

Norwich, though, could be forgiven for feeling frustrated that there had not been a home and away format - they only lost two games, and both by only two points ... 51 - 49 at Griffins and 47 - 45 at Wildcats!

Women, Division Two						
		Pl.	W.	L.	For	Agt. Pts.
1	Griffins (Waltham Abbey)	6	5	1	380 324	11
2	Radcliffe Wildcats	6	5	1	389 340	11
3	Norwich Coe Stars	6	4	2	302 275	10
4	Liverpool Ajax	6	2	4	320 341	8
5	Nottingham	6	2	4	328 346	8
6	Chantry Bobcats (Ipswich)	6	2	4	347 391	8
7	Avon Wanderers	6	1	5	293 342	7

D2 LEADING SCORERS, 1976-1977					
	Player	Team	League	Cup	Total
1	Linda WEBB	Avon	119	-	119
2	Pauline CONDON	Nottingham	94	-	94
3	Nancy BROWN	Chantry	81	-	81
4	Jo ELLIOT	Griffins	80	27	107
5	Jane GOWANS	Norwich	77	-	77
6	Linda GARDNER	Radcliffe	61	46	107

In the event, **Norwich's** fixture misfortune did not count against them, as the experiment of inviting Scots participation in Division 1 proved short-lived, and the top three teams from Division Two were promoted to replace them.

At least, it appears to have been the original intention for the top three to go up, as the EBBA Annual Report records that this was to happen.

However, it appears that the Champions, **Griffins**, may have had a change of heart, as they remained in Division Two, while "Basketball" magazine reported "**Ipswich Bobcats** were delighted to have the opportunity of being promoted to Division One ...".

Nottingham, meanwhile, dropped out of Division 2 (perhaps recognising that Radcliffe's promotion made player recruitment and retention that much more difficult), and **Avon** relocated from Frome to Bristol.

Three new teams were admitted to make the numbers in Division 2 up to six.

Malory Lewisham came in just as their men's team was failing to retain their league status, **Solent** made an entry three years before a men's team from that part of the world did so, and **Sheffield Hatters** finally made the step up into league competition.

Movements	
Edinburgh All-Blacks	Out from D.1
Polonia (Edinburgh)	Out from D.1
Boroughmuir Aces	Out from D.1
Griffins (Waltham Abbey)	Not promoted
Radcliffe Wildcats	Promoted to D1
Norwich Coe Stars	Promoted to D1
Chantry Bobcats (Ipswich)	Promoted to D1
Nottingham	Withdrawn from D2
Malory, Lewisham	New D2 entrant
Scandinavian Homes Solent	New D2 entrant
Sheffield Hatters	New D2 entrant