

Ice hockey



In form: Panthers' veteran defenceman Jonathan Weaver.

Panthers ready for a double 'backlash'

NOTTINGHAM Panthers could be without giant defenceman Brent Henley this weekend.

He turned an ankle at the end of the feisty first period of Sunday's Continental Cup decider against Riga from Latvia and may not be risked.

But, unlike the teams they are playing, they will still be able to boast a full complement of imports.

Corey Neilson's team flies to Belfast tomorrow to take on a Giant's side still smarting from their 2-1 defeat to Sheffield last weekend.

And while Panthers were making progress in the European competition, Coventry Blaze - Saturday's visitors to the National Ice Centre (7pm) - were suffering two Challenge Cup defeats to Cardiff.

Six weeks ago, Panthers had the wisdom to sign young Finnish winger Joonas Saari, who is studying in the city, as an injury reserve and help maintain their regulation 11-import limit.

And after doing well last weekend in the Continental Cup, which has a limit-free import rule, Saari is set to maintain his place should Henley be ruled out.

Belfast, however, have the influential Adam Keefe suspended, while Coventry will be without defencemen Steven Chalmers, Benn Olson and Kenny Kallstrom.

The Blaze, however, have re-signed Canadian forward Gerome Giudice, 24, to help prevent them falling to a ninth successive defeat to Panthers.

And to help shore up their flagging defence, experienced forward Michael Henrich could drop back to help out.

Meanwhile, Panthers' former Coventry defenceman Jonathan Weaver doesn't believe there will be a hangover

By Mick Holland

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from last weekend's Continental Cup triumph when they get back to domestic matters.

Described by coach Neilson as a 'young dinosaur', the 36-year-old stepped up to the plate to log in extra minutes when Henley was injured against Riga.

But he said the players were not dwelling on the past and quickly turned their attentions to Belfast and Coventry.

"It's the case most weekends; you get the job done and then move quickly on to the next weekend," said GB veteran Weaver. "But the only difference this time was that we had three games in three nights against foreign opposition."

"But the GB boys are kind of used to that anyway and it had the feeling of the world championships about it."

"It was fun and good to win of course, but it's over with until next time and now we get back to the business of the league."

Both Belfast and Coventry will be looking to bounce back from defeats but Weaver insists that because of their successes last season, Panthers are always there to be shot at.

"We know what to expect but we know that every team is always up for it when they face us," Weaver added.

"After winning three titles last year we have that target on our backs so teams want to beat us, week in week out."

"We just have to knuckle down as ever and get the job done."

"We want to keep the good run against Coventry going."

"The rivalry with my old team has kind of developed over the years."

"It started when I was there and has continued and we all look forward to it."

Squash

Local businesses rally to Nottingham's PSL cause

By Jon Mattos

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NOTTINGHAM Squash Rackets Club had its 104th birthday last week and celebrated in fine style with their first win of the PSL season at home to Coolhurst London at The Park.

But the club, who have some of the best players in the UK in their national league squad, nearly didn't make it to this point after suffering a financial blow at the start of this year.

The club lost its long-term sponsor and the future of a team playing in the Premiership of the squash world, the PSL, looked bleak.

Chairman Tim Garratt, as well as team manager and pro player Mark Fuller, set about finding new sponsors and re-building the squad and the result was better than they could have ever imagined - with the Notts business community coming together to breath fresh life into the club.

"We needed to find a new crop of sponsors to fund the team," explained Tim Garratt.

"What we found exceeded our wildest dreams. Not only have the sponsors been generous - but they have also helped us promote the team and the first match."

The main sponsor is Air-IT, a company run by Todd McQuilkin - a sports mad New Zealander.

"Todd brought his previous working in the sports industry to bear - as well as putting up cash", said Fuller.

Air-IT have the naming rights for the team but also now support the club's IT infrastructure - including installing a club-wide wi-fi system.

That was just the start - PA Images joined next and provided some amazing images which are on show throughout the club - with the theme being Nottingham winners and including pictures of Carl Froch and Rebecca Adlington, as well as England Squash's top players in Nick Matthew and James Willstrop.

Local commercial property agents Innes England, of which Garratt is a director, put money in as did Fullers' Fantasy Squash company.

"We both felt we needed to put our money where our mouths were!", added Garratt. Gleeds, the global manage-



On court: Eddie Charlton and Emma Beddoes warming up for their PSL fixture at The Park.

ment and construction consultancy who now have 54 offices worldwide, were the last of the initial sponsors which proved enough to enter a team in the PSL once again.

But it didn't stop there, as Garratt explained: "With the help of Todd, we went on a major campaign to see if we could find other sponsors - and the response was amazing."

There are now 18 sponsors - some have given money, others expertise. These are Freeth Cartwright, Smith Cooper, Fast Graphics, Skills Coaches, 360 Recruitment, Daisy wholesale, Three Rooms, RBS, High Growth, Tommy's Tucker, Ineedbroadband and MBC Managed Communications.

This wide-ranging support helped the Air-IT Nottingham side line up for the first match of the season against PSL newcomers Coolhurst on Tuesday.

And four of the five squad were talents from the city.

Eddie Charlton, 25, started playing at Nottingham when he was just eight and his world ranking of 63 is expected to go up this month after qualifying for the US Open.

Current world 130 Chris Fuller, 22, is looking to break into the top 100, while 20-year-old Dave Wardle is a former junior national champion, is the current University of Nottingham No.1 and is world ranked 253.

The female in the team of five for their first clash, 28-year-old Emma Beddoes has played for NSRC for over eight years and is looking to represent England at the 2014 Commonwealth Games, having already been crowned European Team champion with her country back in 2011.

Scottish number one and No.32 in the world, Alan Clyne made up the five, and now entering his third season with The Park-based squad.

Match one got off to a fabulous start when Beddoes, fresh from her WSA Tour title success in the Penang Open in Malaysia, recorded an 11-6, 11-5, 11-3 win over Lauren Selby in a game where she played with an aggressive tempo.

German No.1 and world No.12, Simon Rosner gave the Londoners a boost by beating Clyne 11-5, 11-9, 11-8.

But Charlton and Chris Fuller both won to clinch a 3-2 victory for Nottingham.

Charlton saw off Ben Coleman 11-6, 11-9, 17-15 in a game pitting two of England's up-and-coming players which the Nottingham No.2 saw out after maintaining his composure to close out a lengthy third game, which was not without its controversy.

Fuller, meanwhile, was involved in the longest match of the night in beating Adam Auckland 11-5, 11-4, 5-11, 8-11, 11-2 thanks to a clinical show in the fifth and final game.

Wardle, meanwhile, was on the receiving end of a 9-11, 9-11, 5-11 defeat to Steve London, whose experience told in what was the Nottingham University star's debut in an Air-IT Nottingham shirt.

Local rivals Benz-Bavarian Duffield, runners-up last season, hammered AJP Pontefract 5-0 - which included wins for world No.4 Nick Matthew, Nottingham-based Declan James and former Notts star Tania Bailey, who was playing her first competitive match for over 18 months due to injury.

Squash

James targets spot at World's

NOTTINGHAM'S Declan James wants to make up for missing out on a wildcard entry into the AJ Bell World Championships, which starts this weekend in Manchester.

The 20-year-old from Long Eaton lost in last month's wildcard final which guaranteed a main draw berth for one national player.

James will now have to get through two qualifying rounds in Manchester to qualify for the 64-man, \$325,000 event.

"For any English guy, to have a home World Championships is not something we will experience too many times," said James. "For me to play in it at such a young age will be special."

James said this year's major will be heightened not only by Ramy Ashour, Egypt's world No.1, but by two Englishmen gunning for the trophy.

James said: "Ramy has dominated the sport for so long but Nick Matthew and James Willstrop will be eager to get on the same level."



Meet the squad: The Air-IT Nottingham squash team from game one of the new PSL season are, from left: David Wardle, Chris Fuller, Eddie Charlton, Emma Beddoes and Alan Clyne. Pictures: Andrew Hallsworth