

Grade 8 basketball wins first national championship in school history



Photo courtesy of Basketball England

The Eagles celebrate their 20-point win against Sale Grammar School. After jumping out to an early 26-0 lead, the Eagles had to weather a comeback attempt by Sale Grammar. As a result of their double-teaming strategy in the second half, they were able to pull away and ultimately win the game.

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Making history as the first ASL team to ever win a national championship, the grade 8 boys basketball team was crowned U14 England National Schools Champions on May 12. Playing at the National Basketball Performance Centre in Manchester, the Eagles defeated Sale Grammar School 86-66 in the National Final to cap a 22-0 season.

The team earned the right to play in the National Final after being crowned champions at the London Youth Games Final Four on March 27. This sent them to the National semifinal against Ormiston Park Academy on May 4, which they won 84-71.

The team faced a series of challenges, as well as high and low points throughout the season. However, they were happy with their overall performance, as well as their teamwork and ability to play well with one another.

The team's coach, Colin Bridgewater, commented on their performance with happiness for his players. However, he also admitted to some of the adversaries the team had to overcome in order to be successful in the finals.

He said, "Well, the big challenge was that the entire team was away the week before in Normandy, and we didn't get back to London until about 6:30 Thursday night, and then we had to meet at school at 5:30 in the morning on Friday because it was a four-hour drive to get up to Manchester."

This schedule meant that, following an eight-hour drive back to ASL from a five-day trip in France, the basketball team had only eleven hours between arrival in London and meeting at school the next day for their journey.

"I think it was just rough for the kids coming home so late and then having to get up so early the next morning," Coach Bridgewater said. "Once we got to the Performance Center though, the boys were all business and ready to go."

The team was so ready that they started the game on a 26-0 run in the first seven minutes. "You always go into the game expecting to play like the best team," Finals MVP Devin Erdei said. "And that's what it is when you get to the national championship, so we were all locked in, 100 percent focused on getting nothing else."

However, by the end of the first quarter, Sale Grammar started to make adjustments and pulled the score back to 30-12 in favor of the Eagles. By halftime, the lead had shrunk even more with ASL clinging to a 42-38 lead.

Sale Grammar's success was due to David Akhidime, a player who has represented England at the U14 level. "He'd scored all but two of their points at the half," Coach Bridgewater said. "So we knew he was the one we really needed to shut down. And so starting in the third quarter, we decided to double-team him."

Coach Bridgewater explained that double-teaming a player was a big challenge because it meant that the Eagles were always leaving one of the Sale Grammar School players completely un-

guarded.

The strategy paid off, as the Eagles held Akhidime to just 13 points in the second half after allowing him to score 36 in the first. "I think we really worked as a team well on offense and defense. We got in our positions and were always ready," Erdei said. "We were all in the right place at the right time."

Erdei was named the MVP of the Final for scoring 26 points and grabbing 14 rebounds. He was also tasked with being one of the players who double-teamed Akhidime during the second half.

In addition to playing good defense in the second half, the Eagles' offense also got back on track, allowing them to slowly build back their lead for what ended up being a 20-point victory.

"I think we really deserved (the victory) because we've grown so much from the start of the season," guard Michael Lewis said. "In the first game we played awful, but then towards the end really grew as a team and got to know each other better,

and worked on teamwork."

It was the amount of practice and game time that the team had together that allowed them to play so well. "I think some of our highlights were just the trips that we took like when we went to Aberdeen," Lewis said. "I think it helped us grow closer together and we just had a really good time."

Team captain Devon Aroner agreed that the team's success was down to how much time the players spend with each other on and off the court. "I would say that just throughout the entire year, I think we really grew just personally as a team and as friends. We're all such close friends and I think that helped build our chemistry in the game and helped us push through the challenges."

Overall, it was these very skills that contributed to the ultimate success of the team, leading them to victory.

By the numbers

POINTS	
1 D. Erdei	26
2 D. Aroner	25
3 M. Lewis	15
4 B. Weiss	8
5 C. Perrotis	5

STEALS	
1 D. Aroner	6
2 M. Lewis	4
3 D. Erdei	4
4 J. Yousey	2
5 C. Perrotis	1

ASSISTS	
1 C. Perrotis	5
2 M. Lewis	4
3 J. Yousey	3
4 D. Aroner	3
5 D. Erdei	2

TOTAL REBOUNDS	
1 D. Erdei	14
2 B. Weiss	11
3 C. Perrotis	6
4 M. Lewis	5
5 D. Aroner	5

Stats courtesy of Basketball England



Photo courtesy of Basketball England

Devin Erdei was named finals MVP for his 26 point, 14 rebound performance. He was presented the award by Jamell Anderson, a professional basketball player who has represented England on a U20, U23, and senior level. Erdei said that everyone being in the "right place at the right time" contributed to the team's success in the finals.



Photo courtesy of Basketball England

Michael Lewis was a key contributor to the finals game, scoring a total of 15 points, as well as 4 steals and 4 assists. In addition, Lewis was the only starting guard who did not foul out during the finals. "I think it was a really big mental challenge because in the first quarter, we went up by a lot. But then in second quarter, we went down and some of our best players got in foul trouble. And I think one of the mental problems was just staying humble and keep giving your best even though we were up by a lot," he said.



Photo courtesy of Basketball England

Team captain Devon Aroner played a large part in the team's success. He scored 25 points, made 6 steals, and dished out 3 assists. Moreover, he was top scorer of the semi-finals, with a total of 44 points to help them through to the finals. He said, "I think some of our highlights were just the trips that we took, like when we went to Aberdeen and we played all over London and the UK. I think this brought us closer together and we just had a really good time."