



# IBB Polonia London

**make it through to the semi-finals of English Volleyball Championship.**

**The final match of the regular season took place with second placed IBB Polonia London taking on bottom of the table London Lynx. Both teams had different objectives for the match: IBB Polonia needed three points to ensure a home advantage in the semi-finals of the play offs: Lynx were playing for pride and a final goodbye to the Super 8 division.**

In their previous match, a loss had resulted in their demotion to the National Division 1 next season, but they were determined to sign off with a bang. It seemed as though, the outcome was going to be simple; a quick 3 set match and then a celebration! Volleyball, however is a strange world governed by its own laws: the spectators in the sports hall and sitting in front of their TV screens witnessed a tight four set match. In the end it was IBB Polonia London who emerged the victors, but it was not a foregone conclusion by any means.

„Playing Lynx, you have to expect the unexpected. Our games are always emotional against them. They had nothing to lose, and they really wanted

to leave the top division with a memorable performance. It was also a Chance for their main players to show what they are capable of: I'm certain Marcin Konpa and Sonny Chaney won't find it a problem with finding a new club after their performance against us, be it in England or Europe. Chaney played already two seasons in Belgium and the 23-year-old England International really has great personal attributes: he is tall; well-coordinated and in great shape" said Chris Hykiel IBB Polonia London Director of Volleyball.

The first set began well for the hosts, with excellent serving and attacking from Dziwierek. Shortly afterwards, Lamb: the Lynx setter showed where



the majority of his balls would be placed: in the direction of Chaney. With this duo working solidly, the points being shared between both teams. During the third phase of the set, IBB Polonia regained control and took the set by a margin of 4 points.

The second set was similar to the first, but with the difference that it was Lynx who worked harder at the latter stages and pushed through a sleepy looking Polonia. It was one set all, and this seemed to spur Polonia back into action, with a large margin opening up between the two teams. In the time outs Coach Graban could be seen encouraging his charges very vocally. They sprung into action and won the third set 25-14. It seemed

as though Lynx had been mortally wounded by the IBB Polonia London warriors.

These thoughts did not exist in the minds of the London Lynx players; they wanted to show that they would not leave the division without a good fight. The set went point for point, with both teams fighting tooth and nail. Sometimes Polonia looked to win a point cheaply, but underestimated the Lynx defence, who controlled the ball and pounded it back at Polonia with interest. The score became 25-25, and then suddenly neither team looked strong enough to take it: there were a series of serving errors and hitting mistakes from both sides of the net. In the end Polonia London took the set and the match 29-27 and 3-1.

We didn't play well, because we didn't train well. All week we seemed to be lacking rhythm. We have an excellent team atmosphere, but before this match, we lost focus a little. We played on Sunday, which took us out of our normal routine. I'm not pleased at all with my own contribution to the game; but the plan worked, and we won. I'm certain that the game was a one off: after a tough start to the season, we were ahead of Sheffield

by one point and we needed to win strongly today to keep our second place. Now we wait for the victors between positions 3 and 6 in the Super 8 league table. We will play one of those teams in the semi-finals" said the experienced IBB Polonia libero marcel Sivak.

"The difference on the court was the setter Bartosz Kisielewicz. For the whole match, his contribution allowed strong attacking against a single blocker. I'm sure this was the main difference between the two teams. I love the positive emotions shown on court by Bartosz. That's the reason why I nominated him as MVP today" said Yaro Kowalczyk representative of Top Renovations that proudly displayed their giant court sticker during the game.

The Easter break is around the corner for the Londoners, a chance to relax with loved ones and enjoy a little time off the court. 14th April in Kettering will be the next encounter against Team Northumbria in the Cup Final. The title has been won and retained over the last two years by IBB Polonia London. The play-off semi-finals will be played on the 21/22 April in London against the winners of Sheffield and Wessex quarter final.





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# BUSINESS OF SPORT

## Building a volleyball club brand in England

**IBB Polonia London Volleyball Club are building their commerciality as they chase their ultimate dream of being a professional club. Here Volleyball England's Michael Hallam finds out more about IBB Polonia's incredible journey.**

"I want to be a professional club within 5 years." Bartek Luszcz's vision for IBB Polonia London is bold. "At the latest," says Bartek, the chairman of the club, to underline just how serious he is. "I want to have 20 professional players and team members on the books."

With no professional volleyball league in England, the idea might seem farfetched but anyone who has kept a keen eye on the club will know IBB Polonia are pushing hard to take club volleyball to the next level in this country. From agreeing naming-rights of the team and securing television deals, the club continues to build its commerciality that they hope will give the springboard for Polonia to reach new levels on the court too.

In the Volleyball England's 'Business of Sport' series, the National Governing Body have been exploring the commerciality of Volleyball. In their latest piece, we delve into how IBB Polonia have become England's most commercially astute club and are at the forefront of taking English volleyball to new heights. For Bartek, the journey started over

five years ago.

"I first got involved with the club in 2012 when Polonia were in the English Cup Final," explains Bartek. "I was working as a camera man for Polsat TV at the time and was assigned to the game. I walked in and was amazed that the club had been in existence for 39 years, I'd lived in London for eight years and I'd never heard of it. There were thousands of Polish people living in London, yet the club had no fans and no money. I immediately had thoughts about making it into something bigger."

Bartek sent an email proposal to the club about getting involved and was soon invited to come on board. His first priority was to address the club's lack of profile.

"We didn't go out asking for money," says Bar-

tek. “We worked on building our image and communications. When we took over, our social media was at 300 likes and now it’s almost 8,000. Sponsors want to reach a large following so we first had to create an image of the club before approaching a sponsor.”

It didn’t take the club long to land that first sponsorship deal, helped by the club’s on court success.

“The first deal we secured was for the 2013 League Final,” reveals Bartek. “It had taken a year but we had worked hard to make it happen. The sponsor was for the kit we wore in the final and we won the title. The next year we attracted another company and we’ve built it up step-by-step. The early commercial deals were for small amounts of compared to what we can attract now.”

It sounds easy but the reality is that the Bartek and people behind the scenes at the club have

worked hard to develop this commerciality. One of the keys to their success is giving their sponsors value.

“You have to look after your sponsors,” says Bartek. “Take them on your journey and keep them up to date with what you’re doing. We have a newsletter email that we send out. When approaching sponsors, don’t talk about today’s needs. Sell them the big picture, sell them the big dream. Don’t just feel you’re getting money from a sponsor, get them on board with your project and they will want to renew the next year.

“Sponsors will expect publicity too. We give them coverage in the venue, on the kit in reports, on the website, and on our social media. We post on Facebook directly about the sponsor or use creative ideas to communicate sponsors’ messages to our fans and beyond”

The pinnacle of the commercial deals saw the club secure a naming-right sponsors for the team with builders’ merchants IBB. “It was coincidence that many of our fans shopped at IBB,” says Bartek. “We spoke to them and they happened to be interested in sponsoring us.”

The new-found levels of coverage and commercialisation are all part of the campaign working towards turning the club professional – a campaign Polonia have named: Volleyball 2.0

“Volleyball 2.0 is about building the sports events and commercialisation,” explains Bartek. “We want to improve the level of events we put on. When we played in European Competition in the Challenge Cup, we had 1,200 people buying tickets to watch – it was a sell-out at Crystal Palace. There is clearly an appetite for higher level of events and this brings a new presence for sponsors too.”







The growth of IBB Polonia's fanbase, which has helped them secure more commercial deals, has been remarkable. As well as more social media followers, the team's matches are well attended with 268 people on average going to watch each match in London in 2016/17 season – by far the biggest crowd for any volleyball club in England.

The club encourage supporters to come along and back the club by making each game more of a fan experience. Seating is put out for spectators, there is merchandise available and each match is played in a professional setting with LED advertising boards around the court which has a taraflex floor laid for every game.

It's not just in the stands where the crowds are growing either. This year saw Polonia agree a landmark deal to have their games shown on Polsat – a Polish TV channel, known for the world class coverage of volleyball – and streamed online by UniLad. That is testament to how well received this coverage

has been was that a recent match was moved to a later start time for television – common in leading sports but a revelation for volleyball.

The club has achieved so much in its development that the dream of becoming a professional team now actually looks possible. Bartek says this could be replicated by other clubs in England with the right approach and team in place.

"A club should start by working to prove you can do something, before approaching sponsors," he recommends. "Build your website and social media, being mindful of the image you create. There is always someone who enjoys commercial side of things or who has marketing experience, get these people into the club to help. Don't rely on the players to do these things, instead it is important to grow the non-playing workforce."

"Then look at other clubs and sports and see what is working for them and see if it will work for you. Don't be afraid to try things. Get people involved and you'll be amazed at what you can achieve."

IBB Polonia London have already achieved much more than many people would have believed was possible – on and off the court. Their foray into Europe last season was a historic moment on the court as Polonia became the first English team to compete in the CEV Challenge Cup and recorded a famous victory over FINO Kaposvar and Draisma Apeldoorn. Domestically, they also were crowned as champions of England last two seasons. This season has been more challenging but after a tough start, the London side are well placed to make an assault on the Super 8 Playoffs.

The ultimate dream lingers large though and the vision is to become England's first professional club.

"We need to have a turnover of £1m a year to be a pro club – we're nowhere near that at the moment but through better events, more spectators and competing regularly in European competition, we can get there," says Bartek. "It's been an amazing and we're still on that journey."

# The run of wins continues

**As we reach the tail end of the Super 8 season, IBB Polonia London is becoming a force of nature. On the 3rd of March, the next three points were added to the league table. Local rivals Richmond Docklands were the next team to be brushed aside at the home venue. The match was over on four sets 3:1 (18:25; 25:18; 26:24; 25:23).**

"The match was very demanding as the visitors sets the bar high, with high risk serving: they were determined to make life as difficult as possible for us. I'm sure it was a great game to watch for the fans and I'm confident that our approach to the game was good to see despite illness and injury to a large portion of the squad. Most importantly, despite the deficit in numbers, the players were able

to work together and take all three points. The substitutes contributed immensely to our win which is a good sign for the future." – said IBB Polonia London Head Coach, Piotr Graban.

A key player for the home team was Vitor de Oliveira, winner of the Top Renovations MVP award.

"I was delighted with the way that Vitor, middle blocker for IBB Polonia, played on Saturday. He entered the fight in the second stand made an immediate impact. His great serving and attack as well as very solid blocking really helped the team. At key moments, he took it upon himself to bring the team together with his inspired play and motivated the entire squad. Thanks to this the emotions in the stands reached fever pitch." – said Jaroslav Yaro Kowalczyk, the representative of Top Renovations – the match sponsor.

Despite the "Beast from the East" the faithful fans were drawn to Brentford like moths to a light. The drums were deafening and the atmosphere electric. The Official Fan Club danced by the court wearing their official club shirts and cheers the winning

team on to the very end. IBB Polonia London started retailing personalised match shirts via the internet shop. All fans can now buy their very own shirt with their name on the back. This season the shirts bear the logo of "Niepodległa", because the 100 years of independence is commemorated in 2018.

In the meantime the team from West London can now focus on training as there is a break until 25th March before they play the next Super 8 league match. The match will be in the one venue against London Lynx. The start of the match is planned for a 4pm start. Tickets are available online.

"Now we have a two week break from matches and we will focus on technical issues that need tweaking. We play the last match of the regular season in a couple of weeks and then we focus our efforts towards the play offs and National Cup. We are the current Champions and will not give up these titles easily. We are positive that we can count on our fantastic fans from England and Poland live beside our court and also online and at their television sets." – concluded Graban.



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