George Ferguson Column: Tonight has been a year in the making
From the Fringe...
George Ferguson
Monday, March 5th, 2012

Almost a year ago to the day, I was sitting inside in the P.E. Center on the campus of Carroll College watching the Montana State University-Northern Lights capture a Frontier Conference championship.

It was a special night for Northern and the throngs of Lights fans, who not only came from Havre, but all over the state to witness Northern make history in Helena.

And as I watched the Lights and their fans celebrate that night, on a purple and gold floor, cutting down someone else’s nets in the process, I couldn’t help but wonder what it would be like for a championship game to be played inside the Armory Gymnasium.

Well, I am about to find out.

It’s been 14 years since the last Frontier title game was played in Havre. That was during a great stretch of basketball by the Lights, who won back-to-back league titles in the mid 1990’s. Now, this group of Lights have a chance to do the same.

Northern is already in rarefied air because the Lights will be going to Kansas City next week for the NAIA national tournament, whether they beat the UM-Western Bulldogs tonight or not. It will be the third trip to the national tourney in the last four years for the Lights – which means MSU-N head coach Shawn Huse has something truly special going.

It’s hard to sustain that kind of winning play in the loaded Frontier Conference, and nowhere was that more evident than during a three-game losing streak by the Lights in February. During that time, things started to look a little dark as Northern fell out of first place, needed Western to at least lose one game down the stretch, while the Lights had to win four in a row just to have a chance to host tonight’s game.

But because the Lights have sustained a level of excellence over a lengthy period of time, everything did indeed fall into place.

Northern has won six games in a row, including their first-ever sweep of Westminster and Lewis-Clark State in the road, as well as blowout wins over Montana Tech and UGF in the playoffs.

And now they are home for one last game, where the Lights haven't lost in what seems like forever. There is no doubt Western will be formidable. The Lights and Bulldogs have waged some great battles over the last four seasons. But either way, I’m going to get the answer to the question I asked myself a year ago in Helena.

I’m going to find out just what it will be like for the Frontier Conference championship game to be played in Havre because it’s finally here. It’s finally happened. Tonight is the night and I hope all of you will be there with me. To their fans, the Lights have delivered this gift of hosting this game, the biggest game of the season.

And thanks to this great Lights’ team, in just a few short hours, I will have my answer.