Daniel Horton Trip Report #2: Lights enjoy a busy, but productive day
Daniel Horton
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KANSAS CITY — Tuesday was another long day for the Montana State University-Northern Lights basketball team in Kansas City, but this time it had nothing to do with travel delays, and more to do with the Lights’ packed schedule.

The Lights aren’t wasting any time while in town for the NAIA Mens Division 1 basketball tournament.

Instead, their very detailed itinerary makes it so the team can utilize almost every minute of the day, as they continually count down until their tipoff against Columbia tonight at 7:45 p.m. local time. The day was jam packed with a morning practice, meetings, community service, the opening banquet, and of course plenty of rest when at all possible.

Lights in Kansas City

Day Two

7:45 a.m. – Lights team met in the hotel lobby before leaving for practice.

8:00 a.m. – Loaded the vans and headed to the University of Saint Mary in Leavenworth, Kansas for practice.

8:45 a.m. – Arrived at the University of Saint Mary campus.

9:00 a.m. – Lights begin their nearly two-hour practice on the Sister Madonna Fink Court on the Saint Mary campus.

“It felt good to get out on the floor this morning,” Shaun Tatarka said. “Our main purpose here is to play basketball and we are all chomping at the bit to play. I think we really got some big things done this morning, we were all a little tired and got off to a sluggish start, but we shook it off and got the things accomplished that we needed to for (tonight). This practice was really important because we want to get everything in that we need to prepare for Columbia.”

11:00 a.m. – Team lunch at Jimmy Johns in Leavenworth.

11:20 a.m. – Drive back to the hotel for a short break before community service.

3:00 p.m. – The Lights’ break is over, reloading the vans to travel to Kansas.

3:30 p.m. – Arrived at the YMCA. Did a group presentation to over 50 kids
on the subject of RESPECT on and off the court. Taught the kids respect in sports, as well in life lessons and situations. Finished the session with a game called “pass tag,” in which the kids loved, and a group photo and autograph session.

“Doing this means a lot to us,” David Maddock said. “These kids are the future and it is fun to come out here and talk and play with them. We were able to talk with them about growing and doing the right things. We did this last year too, and it is fun to be able to give them a positive message. It also gives us a good hour to relax and think about other things than basketball, like life and the kids. It is just fun.”

4:30 p.m. – Another trip back to the hotel, this time to freshen up before the tournament’s Tip Off Banquet at the Convention Center Ballroom.

6:15 p.m. – Made the short, five-minute drive to the convention center from the hotel. All 32 teams were announced; the NAIA coach of the year was announced, past players and coaches were honored, dinner was served and a handful of former coaches and players were inducted into the NAIA hall of fame.

10:00 p.m. – The long, but grand banquet ended, and after the banquet got the tournament rolling in a great way, the Lights returned to the hotel for the night.

It was a long, but fun day not only for the Lights, but for me as well, getting to be their shadow once again. With the exception of physically taking the floor and playing, I feel as if I am experiencing everything there is the NAIA national tournament has to offer.

All the Lights players enjoyed the practice and community service, but the highlight of the day had to have been the opening banquet.

This year the NAIA national championship tournament is celebrating 75 years, and the banquet was amazing. It was a bonus that food and cake was served, but being part of the festivities is something I will always remember. Everything came together perfectly, and whether it was the introduction of the 32 teams, or hearing the story of Hall of Fame coach, long time legend and guest speaker Don Meyer, I couldn’t imagine a better way to get the 2012 tournament rolling.

Hopefully the road is just beginning for the Lights, as they prepare for tonight’s game with another busy day. But this time, rest and preparation is key, as the Lights will spend the majority of their time watching the games leading up to their 7:45 p.m. tipoff with the Columbia Cougars.