KANSAS CITY — It wasn’t the same atmosphere on Thursday, as it was the rest of the week for the Montana State University-Northern Lights basketball team.

Instead of the anticipation building towards their first round game, it was more of a somber, find a way to kill some time feel following their devastating loss to Columbia College on Wednesday night.

Players and coaches still held their heads high, cherishing the fact that they made the national tournament in the first place. But remaining in Kansas City just isn’t the same without a game to look forward.

The days prior were chalked full of activities. Thursday, not so much.

It started out with a lazy morning, a lot of the Lights’ players didn’t roll out of bed until around 11 a.m. And while there were still some activities on the teams’ schedule, relaxing at the hotel for most of the day was the choice of the Lights after a grueling season had come to an end.

Lights in Kansas City
Day Four

11:30 a.m. – The Lights team was rounded up and loaded into the vans once again, this time on route to a team lunch at the local favorite, Jack Stack Barbeque.

12:15 p.m. – After a long look at the menu, a lot of hungry athletes finally got to place their order, including a variety appetizers and mass amounts of meat slathered in BBQ sauce.

1:30 p.m. – The only time the team split up all week long. For those who wanted to watch UM-Western’s game, a trip back to the arena, and for those who wanted to relax at the hotel, that was an option as well.

4:45 p.m. – The team was back together and loading in the vans for a team dinner at Janin Nitzel’s house. Nitzel is an MSU-N grad in 1960, living in the Kansas City area, and still follows all things Northern avidly.

5:30 p.m. – Arrive at Nitzel’s house, where a catered meal awaits the Lights, coaches and fans who made the trek. The team social was a nice way to wrap up Thursday’s events.

My flight was scheduled to take off back to Havre at 7:26 p.m., out of the Kansas City International Airport. But it wasn’t the most exciting itinerary home, as it felt like I was leaving the team on a sour note.

Fans, coaches, players and myself all knew the Lights had a great shot at making it deep into the tournament this season. Obviously things didn’t go according plan, but while I am glad to return home, I am also sad the trip has to come to an end. My original plan was to return home on March 19. If that meant the Lights were still playing this week, I would much rather stay in Kansas City for a week. But, all good things must come to an end, and my time spent with the Lights on what was their final journey together, was nothing but a blessing.