Over the last two years, I’ve written a lot about the Montana State University-Northern men’s basketball team. So much so, that there’s little I haven’t already said or reported about the Lights.

But as their season came to a heartbreaking end on Wednesday night with a 58-52 loss to Columbia College at the NAIA national tournament in Kansas City, I thought of one more thing I need to say about, and to the Lights.

Thank you.

I think I speak for everyone who is associated with Northern men’s basketball in one way or another in saying I’m so thankful I got to share in this team’s journey over the last two seasons.

If you are a fan of college basketball and a fan of Northern, then the last two seasons have been pure bliss. If you’re a fan of a team which is made up of great players, who are also great student-athletes, and who are also of high character, then you certainly need to thank this Lights because they were and are all of those things.

If you are a fan of a coach who will work tirelessly to ensure that his team has all of the aforementioned traits then you need to be thankful, as I am, that Shawn Huse is in Havre and hope, as I do, he stays with us for a very long time, even though he is certainly deserving of a job at the NCAA level.

If you are a fan of a team that plays basketball the right way, with heart, soul, honor, class and toughness, but all the while being humble, then you are certainly thankful, as I am, that you’ve got to support a team like the Lights over the last two years because they played that way every single night.

From the very beginning, this Northern team was not only good, but it was special in so many ways. This team, which wowed Northern fans over the course of two long winters, played a gritty, tough, defensive brand of basketball, but was also fun to watch because they loved to shoot the three, something every basketball fan likes to see when they pack the gym every night.

This Northern team was undersized, but it didn’t matter, as they fought hard to deliver not one, but two Frontier Conference championships to Havre. This Northern team was personable, as all of the players were so much fun and interesting to talk to, and they made sure they became part of the Havre community.

This Northern team also embraced the name on the front of the jersey each player wore, and in this day and age, that is becoming more and more rare. This team played together as one, they were unselfish and they loved each other as players, as teammates, as friends, as men. And that too, seems to be more and more rare in this world.

And that’s what we all witnessed over the last two seasons inside the Armory Gymnasium and beyond – something very rare.

We witnessed a true team, playing good basketball, being good students, being positive members of a campus and a community. Trust me when I tell you, that’s not as common in college athletics as one might think.
Eight Northern seniors played their final game on Wednesday night, and that’s a very sad thing because they have been so great, on and off the court. In the meantime, some Lights will be back next year, helping to mold a brand new team, a team I’m sure will eventually get into our hearts the way this team has.

But for now that it’s all over, there’s really only one thing left to say.

Thank you Shawn Tatarka, Sean Kelly, Joe Simpson, LaVon Myers, Devin Jackson, David Maddock, Jordan Harris, Ben Mitchell, Chris Brown, Corbin Pearson, Mike LaValley, Pat Jensen and Baird Henning.

Thank you to Travis Noble and Chris Daniel, and thank you to Shawn Huse for bringing this all together, for leading this great group of young men, and for giving all of us this special gift we’ve enjoyed over the last two years.

Thank you Lights. Thank you for everything you’ve given us while you were together. I know all of you will go on and do great things in life after basketball, but just know, now and forever, you will never be forgotten.