Lights ball being passed on to prep stars
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The Montana State University-Northern Lights basketball team has accomplished back-to-back NAIA Frontier Conference titles, as well as made two consecutive trips to the NAIA national tournament in Kansas City, Mo.

If that doesn’t draw the attention from local prep basketball players, I don’t know what would.

The Lights started their annual team/shooting camp on Thursday at the Havre High gymnasium in Havre, and received a solid turnout. Nine MSU-N players, former players and coaches, including head coach Shawn Huse welcomed in over 50 athletes from all over the state to the camp that will run through Saturday.

Prep basketball players have come from all over, including Havre, Laurel, North Star, Turner, Great Falls, Box Elder, Rocky Boy, Roy, Malta, Saco and Shelby, also bringing in some of the top basketball players in the state.

But the Lights camp isn’t just a generic basketball camp.

The high school aged campers should already have a handle on the basics and fundamentals of the sport, that isn’t Huse’s focus. The fundamentals will be touched upon throughout, but team play, competition and executing in different game type scenarios is the real focus. The camp is geared to make teams as well as individuals better, but with an added twist; the camp is also geared to give local athletes a “flavor” of successful collegiate basketball.

“We have a lot of good kids from all over,” Coach Huse said. “We are excited for this camp, and we are going to be able to teach them the Northern fundamentals and the Northern technique on how we do things. And this first day (Thursday), we are going to run the kids through a Northern practice, so that they can get a feel for what we do day to day.”

If there is a routine that spells success, it would be the daily routine of the Lights. They have the track record to prove it, and the nearly 50 kids got an inside look the first day, and will continue to do so the rest of the week. Thursday’s schedule included, agilities/stretching, cat/mouse, Northern weave, Northern shell positioning, Northern shell screens and cutters, tip drill and shooting footwork, all things that have helped put the Lights on the competitive level they have found over the last several seasons.

Alongside the drills, the camp is also filled with tournaments, where everything covered and learned can be applied. There is a 1-and-1 tournament (home team is down one, shooting a one and on with 20 seconds left), a out-under tournament (home team is down one point with the ball under their basket with
side-out tournament (home team is down one point with the ball on the side with 20 seconds left) and a 3-point tournament (first team to three wins). There is also the typical team, five on five tournament ending the camp.

“We want to give the kids things to think about that will make them all better players,” Huse said. “But also, we have some teams and groups here that will be working on their situational stuff, and will hopefully be able to take some stuff back and pass it on to their coaches and teammates.”

The more successful the team, the more attention they will garner. That is true with the Lights program, and that may very well be the cause of the success of the camp. It continues to grow alongside the Lights program, and while the camp benefits MSU-N, getting the name out there amongst potential recruits, it also benefits the individuals and teams in attendance. As the Lights continue to build their success, those in attendance get to see first hand how they do it.

“That could quite possibly it,” Huse said. “We have definitely seen a jump in our camp numbers, including our youth camp and junior high camp. We will be close to having 200 total kids, and if you put them all in one traditional camp, that is pretty darn good. Maybe some of that has to do with our success, people may be starting to wonder what is we are doing.”

Kendall Denham of Malta is one of the top prep basketball players in the state, at any level. Denham had a standout junior season, but still came to the Northern camp for the first time this summer to better his game. Last season Denham was named the State B MVP after leading the Mustangs to a state title. Denham also averaged 17.7 points per game and 3.3 assists per game as a junior, but still recognized he had some improvements to make.

“I just want to work on my footwork and get a quicker shot off, so that I can come off of screens and shoot faster,” Denham said. “They (the Lights) know how to play team ball, they can shoot well and they have a great coaching staff. I just want to come out and show them what I can do.”

The Northern men’s and women’s basketball teams are in the midst of summer camps. The Skylights and head coach Chris Mouat held their high school camp earlier this week.