From Shoreline to the Hi-Line
MSU-Northern’s trio of Shoreline C.C. transfers has helped the Lights stay on top

Daniel Horton
Tuesday, March 12th, 2013

In the world of college athletics you can normally pick your team, but you can’t always pick your teammates.

Montana State University-Northern’s Roshawn West, Alfie Miller, and Jesse Vaughan find themselves in a unique and interesting situation, as first fate, then a conscious decision brought the three together nearly 765 miles away from where they first began to play together at Shoreline Community College just outside of Seattle.

West, from Seattle, and Miller, from Des Moines, Wash., knew each other before playing for the Dolphins. The two Washington natives grew up playing AAU basketball together before landing at Shoreline. Vaughan, meanwhile, came to the Dolphins from Spokane. The trio didn’t end up in Shoreline all at the same time, but over a span of about three years, they did get one season together, helping a previously last-place Dolphin’s team achieve a conference championship in almost no time at all.

“The coach was new,“ Miller said. “It was only his second year, but I was part of his first recruiting class. We all got recruited separately and randomly, and just kind of ended up there together. We (Miller and West) both showed up to a training camp over the summer and we had no idea we were both going to be there. We didn’t find out until we saw each other.”

Miller was recruited and made the decision to play for the Dolphins early on. West found out about the program from a high school buddy who played baseball for Shoreline and decided to pass West’s number along to the coach. After a couple of open gym appearances, it wasn’t hard for him to see he was a good fit for the program. Vaughan went about it a little bit differently, playing in a combine at Shoreline which brought in several NWACC coaches. But as fate would have it, Shoreline was also smart enough to take the chance on Vaughan, only kick starting the beginnings of a long and successful road.

“I didn’t know anybody playing there at the time,” Vaughan said. “The goal was just to keep playing ball and end up at a four-year school. But we were all pretty close even though we were a new recruiting class. And the year before, Shoreline finished in last place, so we were all able to come together and help turn the program around. That definitely brought the whole team together.”

Playing for the Lights was more of a conscious effort for the three. They had come together and found success at Shoreline, so why not continue to play with teammates you know and have already found chemistry with? But that decision wasn’t until another unique chain of events got the ball rolling.
West was the first to leave the Dolphins’ program, followed by Miller and Vaughan who still had to finish their sophomore seasons. And after taking some time off from the game for personal reasons, West was also the first to start checking out the Lights’ program.

West and Vaughan came to Havre on a recruiting trip together last year, but it took time for things to develop. And once Miller had heard what the experience was like from West, his interest was also peaked as he requested a recruiting package and highlight DVD from Shawn Huse. From that point, it wasn’t long before the three were reunited on the hardwood yet again.

“We texted and talked,” Miller said. “And that kind of helped make the decision to come here easier, since we did already know each other.

“Yeah for sure,” West added. “After I came here, I felt that the environment was good and had a great visit so I signed. Jesse asked me what I did, and I told him that I signed, and that I felt that it would be a great place for us all to play together again. But it was another coincidence. I was a sophomore so I didn’t know what my plans were, while these guys still had another year. But the Northern situation was crazy. Jesse and I came on a recruiting visit together, but nobody had said anything about Alfie (Miller). And that was about two years after I left Shoreline, so it wasn’t anything that instantly happened.”

Vaughan felt the same way and it wasn’t hard for him to sign as well.

“We all kind of figured that Northern was the best environment,” Vaughan said. “And best basketball atmosphere for us to keep playing. It was our best option, and once we found out we could play together again, our decision was kind of set in stone”

Fast forward to where the three are now, and it appears they all made the best decision possible. Not only have they all played major roles in the Lights success this season, they find themselves in Kansas City, gearing up to play for a NAIA National Title.

And it wasn’t just the long chain of success that brought the three all the way from Washington here to Havre. The two consecutive trips to the national tournament were definitely key in sealing the deal, but as the town slogan says, it’s the people. That statement rang true, especially on Vaughan and West’s recruiting visit, where they saw rivals like Carroll help pack the MSU-N Fieldhouse with local fans and supporters of Northern athletics.

“It was crazy, everywhere we went, people were telling the players good job or great game,” Vaughan said. “It was crazy to see the support and love, and you can see that same thing during games. Everybody here wants to see us succeed and it makes me want to play well and do well. Playing here makes you want to be a leader for sure.

“Everybody was really friendly,” West said. “And I was shocked at just how packed the games were that I got to watch on my visit. I played in front of some big crowds, but that was state tournaments. For a college atmosphere, I was impressed with the crowd. I have never been in an environment like this, and I came from a big city. But there is so much support from the people in Havre, and I think this has been a great experience for me. Northern has had a very positive impact on me and this is just another chapter in my life.”

But what has made West, Vaughan, and Miller so successful is their work ethic, and their ability to be great teammates. There is no doubt the three have continually grown together over the two seasons they have
played together, and their chemistry has a two-year head start on what they have with the rest of the Lights’ program.

“We were very lucky to land all three of those guys,” Huse said of the trio. “I’m so glad they all got together and got each other fired up about coming to Northern. They’ve all been instrumental in what this team has accomplished this season. Two of them (West, Vaughan) were all conference and Alfie was probably the runner-up in the 6th-man of the year voting. So we are very fortunate that we got all three of them here to Havre. They are all great players, and more importantly, they are great guys and they’ve certainly been a big part of this team this season.”

“You see how the other person develops as time goes on and just how their game gets better,” West said. “And on the court, it makes it a lot easier playing with people you know because you already know what they can do.

“But coach Huse does a great job of getting us all close,” Vaughan added. “So yes, we have been together for a while, but at the same time, it feels like we have been with the rest of the team for a long time too.”

And now that the Shoreline trio are now just as tight with the rest of the Lights, all that is left to do is make a run at a national title this week in K.C. The last two seasons ended in a tough manner as the Lights failed to get out of the first round. But a young team with a lot of new faces, starting with Vaughan, Miller, and West, have a different plan for what they want to happen this time around. The Lights weren’t the Frontier Conference regular season champions, or the tournament champions this season, but earning an at-large bid the Lights are as hungry as ever to prove they belong in the conversation as one of the top teams in the NAIA.

“This is going to be fun and we are excited,” Vaughan said. “We need to take it one game at a time and make sure we take care of business.”

And if the Lights can take care of business, the goal is a championship.

“The goal is to come back to Havre with a national championship,” West said. “But we also have to make sure we go hard for 40 minutes and make sure we play Lights’ basketball every game and take care of business.

“We want to go down there and win because we know the last couple of years the team wasn’t able to get out of the first round,” Miller added. “We definitely want to make a name for ourselves, make some noise, and keep our season going.”