George Ferguson Column: One night shouldn't define these Lights
From the Fringe...
George Ferguson
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When you get to the level that the Montana State University-Northern men’s basketball program has risen to, there’s no such thing as a moral victory.

And late Wednesday night, or early morning for that matter, in Kansas City, somewhere inside a lockerroom in the bowels of the famed Municipal Auditorium, a building where Wilt Chamberlain once dominated, the Lights weren’t searching for moral victories.

No, no matter how hard the Lights played in Wednesday’s 64-54 loss to Evangel University in the opening round of the NAIA national tournament, nothing was going to make Northern feel better. This Lights’ team, like the three which have tripped to the national tournament before it, wanted desperately to win Wednesday night, and wanted desperately to keep its season going. It wanted so desperately to show the rest of the NAIA exactly why Northern basketball has been so successful in recent years.

And make no mistake, the Lights have been very successful. In the last five years, Northern has averaged 22 wins a season, including 23 this year. MSU-N has went to four national tournaments, shared three Frontier Conference regular season titles and has captured two Frontier postseason championships. There’s hundreds of NAIA program’s which would beg, borrow and steal for that type of consistency.

But none of that will matter to the 2012-13 Lights, at least not for a while. None of the accolades, including three First-Team All-Conference honors will matter to senior Devin Jackson, who played his final game as a Light Wednesday night, and has experienced the sting of losing three times at the national tournament. None of the history and special moments will matter to all the Lights and their great coaching staff after Wednesday night’s loss, at least for a while.

What matters to basketball players is the end result, and that’s why their basketball players. What matters is the “W”, and the shots that went down, and especially, the one’s that don’t. That’s why they are competitors, that’s why they give everything they have for the word Northern of the front of their jersey, and that’s why they pour every bit of their heart and soul into this great game. They want to win. It doesn’t matter if you’re talking about LeBron James, Corbin Pearson or the 8-year-old next door. When you love hoops, you want to win.

And that’s why Wednesday night’s loss will sting for these Lights, at least for a little while. That’s why they won’t be able to immediate reflect on all they’ve accomplished, all they’ve been a part of and all they’ve given to Northern’s great fans this season.

So for now, I’ll do it for them.

I know this Lights’ team didn’t finish the way they wanted to. I know how hurt they feel right now, and in the following few days. I’ve been there. I’ve been involved in competitive sports too. So many of us have, and so many of us know the sting of disappointment.
But I also know how great Northern basketball has been, since Shawn Huse arrived here, even before, and I’ve seen first-hand how great this recent ride has been. It’s remarkable. It’s been special, and it’s not over, not by a long shot. I know how amazing this season has been because I’ve watched it every step of the way. Eight new faces, one returning starter, new roles to play, everybody’s target in the Frontier and yet the Lights still achieved so much. They still persevered and they still won. Maybe not Wednesday night, but these Lights are winners and that’s not debatable.

I know, as the Lights travel home from Kansas City, they’re not ready to reflect on how great they’ve been the last six months. I know they’re not interested in a moral pat on the back and they’re probably not ready to let Wednesday night go just yet. I know this because they’re basketball players and they’re warriors.

But I also know, when they do look back on the 2012-13 season, and even on Wednesday night, they’ll realize just how great they were. Just how special they’ve been. They need to realize it because it’s true.

For yet another year, Huse and Co. took us all on a great basketball ride. They made another daunting winter in Havre a lot more fun. They kept the Northern pride it has in its basketball programs going, and they entertained us all. I also know how proud the entire Northern basketball community is of them, regardless of the “W”.

I know that Wednesday night in Kansas City won’t change any of that. It’s over for now, but the Lights will be back, and until they are, I can look back on 2012-13 and always remember how great this team was.

No single game will change that.