Despite intense rivalry, this friendship endures

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For the past 12 years, Kassie Holmlund and Samantha Schermele have been either teammates or rivals on the basketball court.

More importantly, they've been the best of friends off the court. When Holmlund's University of Great Falls Lady Argos face Schermele's MSU-Northern Skylights Friday night at McLaughlin Center, the basketball part of the relationship will end.

But the friendship won't.

"Sam's been a huge part of my life, even though we haven't really played on the same team for a long time," said Holmlund, a 5-7 senior guard who averages 10.1 points and 3.4 assists per game for the Lady Argos. She ranks 17th in the league in scoring and sixth in assists.

"We always text each other after games, tell each other how we did, and the final scores ... the best part is when we get to play each other," said Holmlund.

Schermele, a 5-10 guard who is the No. 2 scorer in the Frontier Conference at 15.6 points per game this season, redshirted her freshmen season in Havre and will have one more season to compete for Northern.

Holmlund began her career at Rocky Mountain College in Billings and also expected to redshirt her freshman year, but was forced into action because of an injury to another guard. "It was my decision (to play)," said Holmlund. "It would be nice to have another year to play, but everything's worked out pretty well." Holmlund transferred to UGF after one year at Rocky and has started three seasons for coach Shawn Chaffin's program.

Holmlund and Schermele met as 5th-graders on Gene Cook's traveling team — the first organized club program in Great Falls. The girls attended different grade schools and middle schools, but played more than 100 games together in the summers and at tournaments around the region.

Holmlund went on to play at C.M. Russell High, while Schermele was a standout for the Great Falls High Bison.

There were five other players on Cook's 'A' team 12 years ago, and all went on to play in high school. The program also produced another fine college player, Shantell Marquis, who played three years at MSU-Billings before being sidelined this season by a knee injury.

Chaffin said both Holmlund and Schermele have been excellent examples for aspiring young players.
"Kassie's work ethic is second to none," he said of his floor leader. "She survives with caginess and determination, and Sam's a little bit the same way. Neither is going to win the Olympic 100 meters, but both are intelligent players who get a lot out of what they have."

Even though Holmlund's playing career will end next month, she's not giving up on basketball. She plans to work as a graduate assistant with the Lady Argos next season, possibly while working on a master's degree.

"I definitely plan to be an assistant coach," she said. "We haven't won that many games the past three years, but in my eyes, we're headed in the right direction."