George Ferguson Column: It’s been one amazing college basketball season around here
From the Fringe...
By George Ferguson
March 21, 2014

Sports don’t work out the way we want them to sometimes. And other times, they surprise us and give us more joy than we can stand, if only for a moment.

In the last 24 hours, fans of the Montana State University-Northern basketball teams have experienced both. And in order to do that, it’s already had to have been a special season.

To have both the Northern men’s and women’s teams reach the national tournament is something that doesn’t come around too often. Unless you’re UConn or Duke or North Carolina that is. Those three schools have qualified both the men’s and women’s teams at their respective programs the most times in the same season than any other schools in NCAA Division I history.

But for Northern fans, this season has been an extra special treat, a treat that is still going with the triumphant Skylights at the NAIA women’s national tournament in Kentucky.

This season has given Northern basketball fans of all kinds, men’s, women’s or both, a unique year in which both teams were ranked in the NAIA Top 25 at the same time, both teams were in the top half of the Frontier Conference standings all winter, and both teams played at least one game at the national tournament.

It’s pretty spectacular when you think about it, because a feat like that hasn’t happened at Carroll College or UM-Western or even Lewis-Clark State in recent years. Westminster did it this season, but for the Montana schools, Northern’s run to both national tournaments is a first in the Frontier in quite some time.

But as exciting as it’s been this year, and as exciting as this last week has been as the buildup to both national tournaments has been huge, it also shouldn’t come as much of a surprise.

While it’s been well-documented that men’s head coach Shawn Huse has built a program that now competes for a spot in the national tourney every year, so too has Chris Mouat. In fact, Mouat should really have his fourth team at the national tournament instead of his second, if not for the NAIA raters getting it wrong with Mouat’s 2011-12 team, and even two years before that.

No, the consistency in which both the men’s and women’s teams have played over the last decade is really unmatched. And it’s due to great coaching, and great student-athletes. That’s the two constants at Northern, and that’s why the basketball programs are having a year like they’ve had this season.

In other words, Northern fans, Havre and anyone associated with Lights and Skylights basketball has been very lucky this year. This has been a basketball season no one will soon forget.
But we, as Northern fans, are pretty lucky all the way around. We are lucky to have kept Huse (11 years) and Mouat (8 years) around as long as we have, because it’s very hard to keep great coaches, and they are both great basketball coaches. We’re also lucky to have such hard-working, honest and genuine student-athletes who come to Havre from all parts of country and give their all, on and off the basketball court.

We’re lucky to have Northern basketball to watch and enjoy every winter. And this year, we’re lucky enough to have the Lights and Skylights both playing in the spring.

And while it was difficult to see the Northern men’s season end Thursday in Kansas City, it doesn’t diminish another spectacular season of Lights basketball one bit. And no matter what happens with the Skylights from here on out in Kentucky, it won’t diminish the remarkable season they’ve had one bit either.

No, at this point, nothing can diminish what an incredible year of college basketball it’s been in Havre. And if we’re lucky enough, we’ll get to do it all over again next year.