George Ferguson Column: Nothing but pride for our Skylights

From the Fringe...
By George Ferguson
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Pride. That's a word that gets thrown around a lot in sports. Sometimes, it's even over used. But, when talking about the Montana State University-Northern women's basketball team, it's a word that can't be used enough.

The Skylights program has always been a source of pride on Northern's campus, and in the Havre community. And under head coach Chris Mouat, the last 10 years have been no different.

However, this last season, and the last two years for that matter, have been about as prideful as it gets.

Just look at all the things the Skylights, who exited the NAIA national tournament with a loss to top-ranked Freed-Hardeman last Saturday, have done this season alone. Northern won an amazing 29 games, which was just six shy of the 1992-93 national championship team's 35 victories. The Skylights never lost more than two games in a row, and they won 14 straight to start the season, then they won six in a row two more times during Frontier Conference play.

Speaking of league play, MSU-N won 11 of 14 games in the conference season, and if not for a loss to UGF in late January, the only Frontier team to have beaten the Skylights this season would have been the mighty Westminster Griffins, who won the Frontier crown by beating the Skylights by one point in the championship game earlier this month in Salt Lake City.

Yes, the wins piled up this season, and they were all exciting. But, this Northern team was so much more than wins. This Skylight team got in all our hearts for a lot of different reasons - and winning was just one of the reasons we're all so proud of them.

"I'm very proud of this team," said Mouat. "I think the thing that will stand out the most to me about this season is they always bounced back from adversity. They always fought through whatever they were challenged with and they really never let anything get in their way. From October to March, they were pretty consistent, and that speaks volumes to the character and determination and work ethic these kids have."

Indeed, the Skylights were fighters, and that's why we love them. Against teams like Westminster, and in the national tournament last week, Northern might have been underdogs at times, but the Skylights always stood up to whoever was in front of them. They played with heart and tenacity, and that shows in how ferocious they were on the defensive end.

As sports fans, we love the fight in our athletes. We love when we can see our athletes wear their hearts and emotions on their sleeves, and I can't think of many teams I've covered that exemplified that more than the 2014-15 Skylights. They always played with a never-say-die attitude, and while they were really,
really good and blew out a lot of really good teams this season, we loved to love just how hard Northern would fight for everything the Skylights got this season.

We also loved the personality, both as a team and as individuals. We are proud of how much character and honor these Skylights have. We're proud of the team chemistry they have and how much they genuinely care for each other. We're proud of how proud they are to wear Northern on the front of their jersey, and we're proud to know how much they appreciate all the support they get from this great Havre community and beyond. We're proud of this team and how they are true student-athletes, and we're proud that these girls are so personable, so fun-loving and so much fun to root for. We're proud of how competitive they are, and we're proud of all their outstanding individual and team accomplishments this season, accomplishments like A'Jha Edwards breaking records, Taylor Cummings being a truly great ambassador on and off the court, of Cummings and Natlaee Faupel earning Frontier All-Conference, of seniors Megan Feldman and Taybra Teeters being such great players, great leaders and great role models on a great team. We're proud of how Molly Kreyzik and Taryn Norby stepped up in their roles this season, we're proud of how Jacy Thompson played anything but like a true freshman. We're proud of our local girls, Brandy Lambourne, Peyton Filius and Makhayla Farmer becoming a part of this great program, we're proud of Katie Fetterer for how hard she works in practice and we're proud of Rachelle Bennett for being a leader, for bringing passion and experience to a team she couldn't play on this season because of a knee injury.

We're proud of all of it, just like they are. And we're proud of each and every Skylight for what they have given all of us this season, and what they've given to the program, to the campus and to the community.

And we're proud of coach Mouat and assistant coach Nicole Yazzie. After all, Mouat is the master mind behind this whole thing we're so proud of. He is the one who put it all together. He's the one who made each and every one of these girls better basketball players, and he's the one who steered this ship through one of the most memorable Skylight basketball seasons in school history.

We're proud, and we're lucky. We're lucky that the Skylight program we all love so much has a leader like Mouat. Boy, oh boy, are we lucky.

And though he was disappointed to see it all come to an end Saturday against a very good Freed-Hardeman team, he is proud of all of it too.

"29-6 is a great accomplishment," Mouat said. "I can tell you, there is a group of girls and coaches who are pretty disappointed that we didn't get that last win, that we couldn't quite get to 30. But it has been an incredible season. The kids have been great, the fans have been great, the support we've received this season has been amazing. The seniors are a very special group, and it will be next to impossible to replace what they've brought to this program and all they have done for me and for this team. They are a special group. That group has been a part of winning 51 games in two years and three games at the national level. That's incredible.

"And this team is special," he continued. "They've left their mark on this program in so many different ways, on and off the court. It's actually really hard to realize that it's all over now because this team has been so special. But it's been a great season, and one that I think we'll all remember for a long, long time."

Yes, it has been an incredible season. It indeed has been one that no one who loves or cares about Skylight basketball will ever forget.

And I don't care how cliché it might be to say it over and over again, but pride is the one word I think we can all agree on to sum up this magical Skylight season best.