



BY ROB VANSTONE

Lucas Stasuik heard the Lions' roar once more.

The crowd at Luther College High School erupted, as per tradition, when a host team first charged on to the court on Thursday. Such was the scene in the early stages of the 70th Luther Invitational Tournament — a prestigious high school basketball event that was part of Stasuik's life even before he enrolled at the Royal Street campus.

“I've been coming here since Grades 7 and 8, so there was a lot of anticipation,” Stasuik, now a graduating member of the Luther Lions senior boys basketball team, said outside the Semple Gymnasium after Thursday's game against the Winnipeg Dakota Lancers. “Looking forward, it had always been a goal to play in LIT.”

Stasuik was preceded at Luther by his brother, Noah, who was heavily involved in the student-run tournament even though he was not a basketball player. “It's one of the longest-running tournaments in Canada and it's more than just basketball,” Lucas Stasuik noted. “We have a big community behind it, with arts and media and all the committees. That really pushes the tournament forward.”

So does the energy that emanates from the stands. “It’s a crazy experience coming out of the tunnel, having our whole school behind us,” Stasuik marvelled after Dakota’s 85-57 victory.

“It’s just so much fun, playing with my guys on the court and having the whole community behind you.” The Luther-Dakota senior boys game was followed by Thursday’s finale, in which the Raymond Comets senior girls defeated Luther 109-38.

A Raymond, Alta.-based team was also victorious in the opener of LIT 2024. In an early-afternoon senior boys game, Raymond outlasted the Winnipeg Sisler Spartans 87-85. In Thursday’s other senior boys competition, the Riffel Royals defeated the defending-champion Magrath (Alta.) Zeniths 81-71 and the Calgary Sir Winston Churchill Bulldogs downed the Campbell Tartans 96-60.

In Friday’s senior boys championship-side semi-finals, Riffel will oppose Raymond (3:30 p.m.) and Dakota will meet Sir Winston Churchill (7:15 p.m.). The victorious semi-finalists will meet on Saturday, 8 p.m., in the senior boys championship game. The three upcoming senior boys games referenced above will all be played at the Semple Gymnasium, which has been LIT’s primary venue since 2015.

The historic gym, where the inaugural LIT was played in 1953, is now known as the Merlis Belsher Heritage Centre. The availability of gymnasiums old and new has enabled LIT to have eight-team senior boys and senior girls draws since 2016.

On the female side, Friday’s other scores were: Magrath Pandas 79, LeBoldus Golden Suns 71; Dakota 98, Saskatoon Walter Murray Marauders 59; and, Winnipeg Garden City Gophers 76, Winston Knoll Wolverines 60.

Friday’s senior girls A-side semi-finals are set for 4:30 p.m. (Raymond vs. Garden City, Belsher Centre) and 5:15 p.m. (Dakota vs. Magrath, Semple Gymnasium). Saturday’s senior girls final is set for 6 p.m., at the Semple Gymnasium. Raymond is the defending female champion.