



BY ROB VANSTONE

Members of the Dakota Lancers are studying for another final.

For the second consecutive year, the Lancers are to meet the Raymond Comets in the Luther Invitational Tournament's senior girls championship game. A year ago at Luther College High School's Semple Gymnasium, Raymond registered a down-to-the-wire, 64-62 victory over Dakota.

Abby Sweeney remembers it well. Then a Grade 11 student at Winnipeg's Dakota Collegiate, Sweeney's steal and layup had created a 62-62 tie with 17.2 seconds left. That was a prelude to a game-winning basket by Raymond's Delaney Gibb, who completed the scoring with eight seconds remaining.

"It was amazing," Sweeney said of the classic contest. "Last year, taking the loss, that kind of kept our heads up and motivated us for redemption. I think we're excited. We have a game plan and we're going to play our best. Raymond's a really good team, so we're just going to see how the outcome goes."

Raymond trailed 37-21 before staging a spirited second-half rally. The Comets assumed a 62-60 lead when Gibb scored with 49.9 seconds left in the fourth quarter. Sweeney and Gibb then traded baskets as the fans revelled in the frantic final minute.

"The crowd was awesome," Sweeney recalled. "Even though none of them were any of our fans, the crowd was cheering for us and it was amazing. The atmosphere and just the whole gym was so cool. It felt like an NBA game."

Having experienced the 2023 event, Sweeny is especially delighted to be back at LIT with her teammates.

“This is probably one of the best tournaments I’ve been in,” she said. “With the fans and with the students who put all this together, the effort means a lot to everyone and it puts a smile on everyone’s face.”

Dakota advanced to Saturday’s senior girls final (6 p.m., Semple Gymnasium) by defeating the Magrath Pandas 66-42 on Friday. In the other championship-side semi-final, Raymond hit 20 three-pointers en route to defeating the Winnipeg Garden City Gophers 111-60.

Raymond and Dakota will also meet in Saturday’s senior boys final (8 p.m., Semple Gymnasium). In Friday’s senior boys championship-side semi-finals, Raymond defeated the Riffel Royals 105-75 and Dakota downed the Calgary Sir Winston Churchill Bulldogs 63-50.

Raymond has won the most senior boys titles (12) in LIT history. The Comets emerged victorious in 1961, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1968, 1969, 1970, 1971, 1978, 1997, 2009 and 2011. Dakota won its only LIT championship in 1977.