



BY ROB VANSTONE

Proud members of the Luther Lions, 1984 LIT champions, stood on The Spot where Bill Knudsen hit The Shot.

“It’s part of Luther lore and LIT lore,” Knudsen reflected on Saturday while sitting with his teammates from 40 years ago and enjoying the 70th Luther Invitational Tournament. Depending on who was writing it, the shot was from 25 feet, from 35 feet, or a half-court heave.” Regardless of the distance, it was the most famous two-pointer — the three-pointer had yet to be introduced in high school basketball — in LIT history. Let’s set the scene, flashing back to Feb. 18, 1984.

With two seconds remaining in the senior boys final, the LeBoldus Golden Suns were leading Luther 56-54. Not only that, LeBoldus had possession of the basketball. All that was needed was a successful in-bounds pass and a couple of seconds of ball security for LeBoldus to claim the title.

The odds were not in Luther’s favour, but nobody passed the percentages along to Knudsen. Once LeBoldus in-bounded the ball, it was swatted away and stolen by Knudsen, who promptly launched a buzzer-beating bomb that swished through the netting to create a 56-56 tie and force overtime. After a tension-filled extra session, Luther emerged with a 64-62 victory.

It was only the second LIT title for Luther since the tournament's inception in 1953. The Lions won the inaugural LIT and then waited another 31 years to claim another title. Not only that, the Lions had not played in an LIT final since 1958 when the 1984 tournament began. After 70 LITs, Luther has won its tournament on four occasions (in 1953, 1984, 1990 and 2006).

In conjunction with the 40th anniversary of the 1984 championship, members of that team were the special guests at LIT 2024. Ten of the 12 players, plus head coach Dick Stark, were present. "It's about more than basketball," Adam Johnstone said. "It's about the group of guys we had. It's like we haven't missed a beat. It feels like we're still 17 years old. We just pick up the conversations."

Some of them were held on the court at Luther College High School's old gym, now known as the Merlis Belsher Heritage Centre. (Belsher, who played in the 1953 LIT, attended the 2024 tournament and helped with Saturday night's awards presentations.) The Belsher Centre was the sole home of LIT from 1953 to 2014. Since 2015, the new Semple Gymnasium has been the tournament's primary facility, although games are still played on the school's legacy court.

Once Saturday's final game at the Belsher Centre was played, eight members of the 1984 team kindly posed for a photo near the still-up-for-debate location from which Knudsen made history. He was to the right of the basket, facing the stage, somewhere near what is now the three-point arc.

"It's such a great memory," Johnstone said. "The old gym looks smaller than I remember, but it was a great time in our lives." Johnstone, a Toronto-based architect, was joined at the 40-year reunion by Stark, Knudsen, Cam Smith, Patrick Heal, Robert Hawrysh, Jim Slinn, Ken Phillips, Lindsay Dencsak, Jeff Christiansen and Rob Ramsay.

"The excitement the guys experienced from winning LIT was tremendous and, now that we're obviously all older, it's something that we're all very grateful for," said the Edmonton-based Knudsen, who was named the MVP of LIT '84. "It's a real bonding moment. We've got 10 out of 12 guys here and the guys have travelled all across Canada — or from California — to be here. It has just been a great weekend of reminiscing."

It was also a great weekend for the Raymond Comets, who became the first team to sweep the tournament finals. Delaney Gibb scored 42 points to power Raymond to an 88-68 victory over the Winnipeg Dakota Lancers in Saturday's senior girls final. The 42 points were the most ever by a senior girls player at LIT. Gibb also set a senior girls record for points in a tournament, putting up 89 over three games.

LIT introduced an eight-team senior girls draw in 2016. Raymond, which also defeated Dakota in last year's final, is the second senior girls team to win back-to-back LIT titles. LeBoldus was victorious in 2019 and 2020. The Comets completed Saturday sweep by defeating Dakota 101-96 to win a record 13th senior boys championship.

Talan Ralph led Raymond with 39 points — 33 of which resulted from three-pointers. Everson Harker added 29 points for the Comets. Kismayo De Michael paced Dakota with a game-high 47 points. Harker (boys) and Gibb (girls) were named the tournament's MVPs. The boys' all-stars were De Michael, Ralph, Blake Penner (Dakota), Matt Payne (Magrath Zeniths) and Osagie Okundaye

(Riffel Royals). The girls' all-stars were Katie Anderson (Raymond), Darya Rom (Dakota), Izzi Fust (Dakota), Nicola Meban (LeBoldus) and Mia Wilde (Magrath Pandas).

De Michael (boys) and Hope Larocque (Dakota) won the Hustle Awards. Team sportsmanship awards were presented to Luther (girls) and the Calgary Sir Winston Churchill Bulldogs (boys). Riffel (boys) and Magrath (girls) were honoured as the third-place teams.