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SPORTS

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Surprise, surprise: Elgin stuns heavy favorite

By: Jerry Fitzpatrick



Elgin's Kory Brown drives past La Lumiere's Obij Aget during the championship game of the 2011 Elgin Holiday Tournament.



Elgin's Arie Williams drives past La Lumiere's Antonio Drummod during the championship game of the 2011 Elgin Holiday Tournament.

Ah, the La Lumiere game

I think about Elgin's 2011 upset of the nationally ranked Lakers whenever I see former Maroons Kory Brown, Dennis Moore or Arie Williams.

Brown was a two-time Daily Herald All-Area basketball captain in 2011 and 2012. He went on to play collegiately at North Dakota State and professionally in Germany.

Williams was named all-area captain in 2013. He enjoyed a successful career at Division II Barry University in Tampa.

Moore was a three-sport athlete and a born leader. He was named Fox Valley area Athlete of the Year in 2012. He played running back for Wisconsin-Whitewater's 2014 Division III national championship football team.

Those three special athletes were teammates in December of 2011, along with skilled ballhandler Cortez Scott, perimeter shooter Matt Andres, post man Eric Sedlack and role players like Devin Gilliam, Derek Moorman and Joe Quick.

The Lakers were ranked in USA Today's Top 10. They breezed through bracket play to reach the title game of the Elgin Holiday Tournament.

The Maroons got there by overcoming an 11-point deficit against defending tournament champion Neuqua Valley. Asked about the La Lumiere matchup after the semifinal, Brown was fearless, saying: "You can be an NBA team. We're coming at you hot."

That's exactly what happened against La Lumiere, which was missing two top players due to injury. Elgin was still a clear underdog. The Lakers were bigger and deeper.

Former Elgin coach Mike Sitter kept the visitors guessing by switching between man-to-man and zone defenses. Elgin made shots from the perimeter early and held the Lakers to 14 first-half points. The Maroons never trailed, though their lead was cut to 36-34 late.

Brown was fouled with 35 seconds left and sank two free throws to make it a 4-point game. The Elgin fans began to sense it. The packed student section, on their feet the entire game, was primed to explode.

This was around the time administrators were trying to keep high school kids from charging the floor due to safety concerns. There was no stopping the fans on that night, however. Once the final buzzer sounded on a 40-34 upset, the students poured from the stands and enveloped the Maroons.

Everyone was smiling. Everyone was chanting. The players were jumping up and down. Coaches were hugging each other. A seemingly unreachable goal had been achieved.

To me, the beauty and joy of sports joy were encapsulated in that moment.

That's why it was my favorite game.