

Page 6
The News Herald
June 10, 2020

24-EMERGENCY SERVICE

FAIRMOUNT DOOR

RAYNOR SALES • SERVICE • INSTALLATION

GARAGE DOORS AND OPENERS SINCE 1975 • 800-261-8641

FAIRMOUNTDOOR.COM

sports

2018 IWU National Championship

The tournament run

By Sean Douglas

As was the case in 2014 and 2016, playing basketball with a fearless mentality played a crucial role for the Wildcats out in South Dakota.

The Wildcats won their first two contests – a 87-76 triumph over RV Antelope Valley and an 85-72 victory over No. 15 IU Southeast – but the players felt that something was amiss, and for the first time, fear grabbed hold.

“I think heading out there, our confidence was high, but for some reason, as the first couple of games got going along...there was something that was just holding us back,” IWU guard Kyle Mangas said. “It’s hard to put a pinpoint on it, but it was causing us to be a little frustrated and not play to our full potential.”

The seniors were worried that they wouldn’t lead this team to the national championship game in their senior season. Other players were afraid that they would go cold from the field during the game and ultimately cost the team a win, or that their future opponents would get off to strong starts and knock them out of the tournament.

On the night before their

Elite Eight contest with No. 5 Morningside, the Wildcats met with one another as a team, looking to re-center themselves and put their fears on the backburner.

“Going into Morningside, we had a lot of respect for them,” IWU center transfer Evan Maxwell said. “There was an appropriate fear there, because if we didn’t have it, and we got complacent, they would have beaten us for sure. They were a really good team. But there was a significant moment the night before...of us putting our fears on paper and throwing them in the garbage. I just felt lifted up by my teammates and my coaches. I felt freedom because my teammates believed in me. They didn’t care about anything from the past. We were just very in the moment.”

Just as the 2014 and 2016 national championship teams had done before them, the 2018 team cast all of their doubts aside, putting their trust in God, as well as lifting each other in encouragement and in prayer.

God first. Others second. The IAmThird mentality.

“It was the spiritual growth of that team that really marks that season,” IWU Head Coach Greg Tonagel said. “We learned



Third in a series

how to play with joy, but once again, it was a manifestation of fearlessness as we fixed our eyes not on ourselves, not on the pressure or the performance, but on Christ. We found a joy in our playing that set us free.”

Against the Mustangs, the Wildcats shifted into a higher gear. After beginning the game with eight straight points, the Wildcats ended the first half on a 23-8 run to take a 43-26 at the half-time break.

A Jacob Johnson putback early in the second half gave the Wildcats their biggest lead of the contest at 57-32, but the Mustangs did not go down without a fight, eventually cutting the lead to 10 with a 25-10 surge of their own.

However, a Canaan Coffey three-pointer, followed by a Johnson slam, put the Wildcats up 74-59, giving them an advantage they would not relinquish.

“That game was fun,” Coffey said. “I think that is where things took off and things clicked. We had been wanting to match up with them for as long as the bracket [had been] out. We knew they were a really good team. We came out and we shot pretty well that game, and we just dominated.”

“After that game, we didn’t feel like we could be stopped.”

In the Final Four, the team had to square off against No. 1 seeded, and No. 1 ranked IU East, whom the Wildcats had lost to back in November of 2017. The Red Wolves were in the midst of a 25-game win streak and were playing some of the best basketball in their program’s history.

Heading into that contest, the Wildcats were not thinking about the Red Wolves’ win streak or their talent. Rather, they just focused on

one another, and the rest took care of itself.

“When we went into that game, we felt free,” Coffey said. “Our mentality, we weren’t thinking about, ‘What if this happens?’ or ‘What if this goes wrong?’ We were just [planning] to go out there, have fun, and play for each other. It all started that morning. We had a really good devotional time with our dads and with the team and spent a lot of time in prayer. We shared what we were thankful for that year.”

“It was just another game for us. We weren’t really concerned about the results of it, which is why we played so free.”

The Wildcats built a 23-9 lead midway through the first half, but the Red Wolves responded with a 24-8 run to grab a 33-31 lead. IWU quickly regrouped, taking a 37-35 advantage into halftime.

The two teams continued to battle throughout the second half, and with eight minutes remaining, IU East led 60-56. Over the next four minutes, the Wildcats would regain the advantage, outscoring the Red Wolves 13-4 to take a 69-64 lead.

“Every time it got to a point where we were down four or five points, somebody would end up making

a big play,” Maxwell said. “Guys just kept stepping up. Everybody being together in that moment was huge. That freedom and confidence definitely played a huge factor.”

The Red Wolves eventually tied the game at 69-69, before Mangas scored underneath to put the Wildcats back on top with 1:24 to play.

IWU led the rest of the way, and with 8.1 seconds to go, Joel Okafor hit the game-winning free throws, and IU East’s desperation heave fell harmlessly to the floor, putting the Wildcats back in the championship game, setting up a rematch with conference foe Saint Francis.

Okafor played a career game for the Wildcats, scoring 18 points while collecting three rebounds, three assists, and three steals.

“IU East had a 25-game winning streak, and they were the No. 1 overall seed,” Tonagel said. “Joel went 6-for-6 in that game and just played a tremendous game. It was his heart that led us in that moment.”

Mangas led the team with 20 points and nine points, Maxwell recorded a double-double with 15 points and 12 rebounds, and Smith scored 12 points on six-of-nine shooting.

Former Madison-Grant football, basketball star to be inducted

By Sean Douglas

In the late mid and late 1990’s at Madison-Grant High School, Max Miller was a key cog in the Argylls’ success both on the football field and on the basketball court.

After graduating from Madison-Grant in 1998, he went on to Purdue, where he started all four years for the Boilermakers.

Later this summer, Miller will achieve immortality, as he will be inducted into the Grant County Sports Hall of

Fame as part of its 12th class.

On the football field, Miller played with a tenacity and grit that all linemen need to have. Behind his stout blocking ability and his leadership qualities, the Argylls compiled a 33-7 record during his four years at Madison-Grant.

“When I think of Max Miller, I think of one word – toughness,” Grant County Sports Hall of Fame President Andy McCord said. “Max was one of these guys that wasn’t afraid to get



Max Miller
dirty in the trenches on the offensive and defensive lines of the football pro-

gram when Madison-Grant was very competitive in the conference. Max was part of the foundation during their run in the mid and late 90’s.”

When it comes to the game of football, the offensive and defensive linemen never got enough credit. Quarterbacks always receive praise when they make a big play, running backs are cheered after a big run, and wide receivers receive recognition for their highlight-reel catches.

But without a strong line

to pave running lanes or allow the quarterback time to go through his progressions, those big plays do not usually come to fruition.

“He was ‘Mad Max,’” McCord said. “He was so good and so strong knowledgeable wise with his positions. He was a great offensive lineman. He was a great defensive lineman. It’s the linemen that make or break the game a lot of times. Max was one of those guys that never got lost in the shuffle, because he was always involved in a

play. He was one of the guys that got after it play after play after play. Watching him, you appreciated what he brought to the football field.”

And in his time with the Argylls, Miller was one of the best linemen to come through Grant County.

“When you stop and you look at the percentage of kids just in Grant County alone, the kids who have played high school sports and have [gone on] to play Division I football or bas-