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## Miramonte basketball teams winners in Wyoming tournament



Nick Watson

Photos Gint Federas

By Jon Kingdon

For those looking to get away for their Christmas and New Year's break, Gillette, Wyoming, located in the northeast section of the state, would not be most people's first choice. However, for a boys or girls high school basketball team, it was the place to be to compete in the 23rd Energy Classic Holiday Basketball Tournament, which is what the Miramonte basketball teams did from Dec. 31 to Jan. 4.

The idea for the tournament came about because Campbell County High School in Gillette had such dominant girls and boys basketball teams. Each team had won nine state championships between 1992 and 2004.

"We started the tournament because Campbell County was so good," said Dave Olsen, co-chairman of the Energy Classic Committee. "We couldn't get any home games in town. No one would schedule nonconference games up here. They only had five home games one year which is what sparked the idea for the Energy Classic."

Most of the teams that compete in the Energy Classic are from west of the Mississippi, and the 2020 event comprised eight teams from Wyoming, California, Idaho, Oregon, Nevada and Canada.

To attract the top teams to Gillette, the tournament pays for 10 meals for the teams, helps out with the motel rooms, tries to set up off-time activities and provides a host family for each of the teams. "Gillette, Wyoming is not a December Christmastime destination so we try to help the teams out," said Olsen.

The Miramonte girls team had played in this tournament before but this was the first time for the boys. Shortly after he was hired by Miramonte, boys head coach Chris Lavdiotis learned not only of the tournament but also that both the boys and girls teams were going to play there: "When I saw it on the schedule, I went up to Kelly (Sopak) and he told me that it was a wonderful event. I said great but I have only one question: Are the boys and girls teams staying at different hotels? When he said yes they were, I said that's one less headache for me."

The temperatures in Gillette, which ranged from 20 to 35 degrees, were a concern going in. "The view flying into Denver and then to Gillette was really good," said senior Matt Meredith.

"When we got off the plane in Gillette, it was really cold and a shock to us."

Junior Niyi Olabode echoed Meredith's reactions: "We were not that used to the cold. The moment we

came out of the plane, there was snow on the ground and it was cold with a lot of flatland. Still, it was good to see a different environment."

All of the games were played at Gillette Community College's Pronghorn Center. "We were all very impressed with the arena," said Olabode. "There was free admission and it was very well supported by the people."

There was a real opportunity for bonding for the team, said Meredith: "We went bowling one night as a team and we were able to really focus on basketball. When we were not playing in a game or watching our girls team play, we were watching game films."

Basketball is basketball but in Wyoming and in many other states, there is no shot clock as there is in California: "We did not let the lack of a shot clock affect us," said Olabode.

Lavdiotis has made it a point this season to use his entire roster and after eight games, there were nine players that have averaged at least ten minutes per game. This strategy worked out well in Wyoming for Miramonte: "Up here with the altitude at 4,500 feet, the players were getting gassed a little bit sooner so we were rotating players in and out," said Lavdiotis. "We were giving our players 3-4 minute bursts and if any of the play-

ers showed any wind, we would get them out and give them a drink and then get them back into the game."

Even with good game preparation, the Matadors lost their opening game to South Eugene (Oregon) by a score of 61-57 due to a number of missed free throws and assignments. Miramonte came back to win their final two games against the aforementioned Campbell County 62-40 and Benson Tech (Portland) 57-49. The Miramonte girls were playing shorthanded when Mia Mastrov fell ill and was sent home. The girls lost their opening game to Orangewood Academy (Garden Grove, California) by a score of 63-62 but came back to defeat Campbell County 66-42 and Bishop Gorman (Las Vegas, Nevada) 59-53. The tournament was an educational experience for Lavdiotis and the team: "I learned that my team can receive honest criticism when it's candid and direct. Our communication skills picked up after the loss in our first game."

For Lavdiotis, Gillette is a nice place to visit but ... "This has been a great venue and everything was first class. It's been a great experience and a top notch tournament. The people up here have been fabulous and very welcoming. The crowds have been great. Gillette Community college is really nice. It's a good venue with everything being first class. I love exploring places but I would not make this trip every year. There are a lot of good tournaments locally so returning to Gillette might be something that we could do every few years."



Mia Mastrov

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