

BY ROB VANSTONE

Welcome to Hawley-wood!

The Saskatoon Walter Murray Marauders' Zach Hawley earned marquee billing on Day 1 of the prestigious Luther Invitational Tournament, which has a Hollywood theme for its 71st year.

Hawley, a Grade 11 guard, had 38 points — 10 of which resulted from FIVE dunks — to help his team register a 105-60 senior boys victory over the Winnipeg Garden City Gophers on Thursday at Luther College High School's Semple Gymnasium.

"I love it," said Hawley, who had back-to-back-to-back dunks in the third quarter.

"Everyone's looking out for each other. We're just making sure we're feeding off each other's energy. It's super-fun."

The victorious head coach was Hawley's father, Scott, who ensured that his son would quickly develop an affinity for basketball.

"He had a basketball in my hands for my baby pictures," Zach Hawley said. "I've been playing, really, since I was four.

"He put me in a good space to learn the game and to make sure I'm doing the right plays. It's not about the points or whatever. It's just, 'Go and play the right way.' "

As evidence to that effect, Hawley derives his greatest satisfaction from contributing to and lauding the success of his teammates.

Consider his first third-quarter dunk, which resulted from a nifty off-the-backboard set-up.

"Shout-out to Isak Larsen," Hawley said with a smile. "He's a great guy and he's always looking for me out there. I really appreciate him."

Hawley's appreciation for LIT began when he first played in the tournament as a Grade 9 student.

Two years later, there weren't any second thoughts when playing in the first game of LIT 2025 required a 6:30 departure from Saskatoon on Thursday morning.

"It's always a great atmosphere," Hawley said. "Seventy-one years ... you can't beat that. There's no one else in the country who has had a tournament for that long."

And there aren't many teams that have a player who is comparable to Hawley, who is a prolific dunker at an even six feet tall.

"I might be listed at 6-1, but that's a lie," said a chuckling Hawley, whose standing vertical jump is 38 inches.

As the 2025-26 academic year approaches, he plans to move to Alberta and attend Calgary-based Edge Academy.

“I’m hoping to play my Grade 12 year at a prep school, Edge prep, and go and take the next step in my basketball career, knowing that I’ve got to get some eyes on me somehow,” he said.

“Understanding that I’ve got the skills now, I’ve got to go and show them off, so I’m getting on these circuits and going to Calgary where there’s more eyes.”

The eventual goal?

“I’m hoping for a Division 1 scholarship to go play in the States and pursue my education there as well,” Hawley replied.

“I really love school and I want to make sure that I can get somewhere that I want to play basketball and also learn for free.”

In the meantime, he is savouring time spent with the Marauders and, for the next few days, at LIT.

On Thursday, he amassed the previously referenced 38 points before being rested for much of the fourth quarter. He scored at a pace that would have netted him 50-plus over a full game — not that he is focused on matters such as individual statistics or accolades.

“It’s about our team culture and atmosphere,” Hawley said. “You can go up to 60 and lose and what does it mean? We just make sure everyone’s getting a piece. That’s how winning is done.

“There’s no formula for just one guy. This isn’t a solo sport, so you’ve got to make sure everyone’s getting touches.

“It affects all aspects of the game. If someone’s not getting the ball on offence, why would they play defence for you?

“We move the ball and play the right way. That’s how we were taught.”

Walter Murray will meet the Cardston Cougars in a championship-side semi-final on Friday at 7:15 p.m. In the other boys championship semi-final, the Martin Monarchs will oppose the Calgary Ernest Manning Griffins at 5:15 p.m. Both games will be played in the Semple Gymnasium.

On Thursday, it was: Ernest Manning 84, Riffel Royals 57; Martin 101, Winnipeg Miles Macdonell Buckeyes 73; and, Cardston 71, Luther Lions 59.

In Thursday’s opening-round senior girls games, it was: Lethbridge Collegiate Institute Clippers 83, Saskatoon Centennial Chargers 57; Miller Marauders 72, Garden City 46; Winnipeg Dakota Lancers 80, Luther 49; and LeBoldus Golden Suns 91, Walter Murray 53.

Friday’s girls semi-finals are set for 3:30 p.m. (LeBoldus vs. Dakota, Semple Gymnasium) and 4:30 p.m. (Miller vs. Lethbridge, Merlis Belsher Heritage Centre).

Saturday’s finals are at 6 p.m. (girls) and 8 p.m. (boys), in the Semple gym.

