

Saginaw High, Arthur Hill mark end of rivalry with special 'Game of Legends'

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Arthur Hill at Saginaw High Boys Basketball

The final Arthur Hill-Saginaw High boys basketball game will have a different feel, both in location and its place in history.

The Arthur Hill and Saginaw High boys basketball programs are the last individual programs at the two schools before they merge and move to Saginaw United for the 2024-25 school year.

"It's the greatest basketball rivalry in the state," former Arthur Hill coach Dave Slaggert said. "Take the size of the city and the fact that there were only two teams in the city, then look at the amount of times they were in at least the quarterfinals ... almost half of the years that there has been a tournament.

"Some cities, like Flint, had great teams, great rivalries. But it's different with multiple schools. It's different with just two schools. Saginaw also has had marquee players ... the Draymond Greens and Jason Richardsons and Tony Smiths and Craig Dills. Add the iconic coaches, plus the buzz in the city. You just can't explain to people who have never experienced it the electricity that's part of a Saginaw High-Arthur Hill game."

And that electricity could hit historic levels in their final regular-season game Friday, Feb. 16. The game – the only regular-season matchup of the season between the teams – has been moved to the Dow Event Center, with a special banquet before the game and special recognition to state championship teams at halftime.

The Saginaw United girls basketball team – a co-op team for the first time this season – will play Flint Carman-Ainsworth at 5 p.m., with the boys game to follow.

"They're going to make it big ... it should be a special moment in Saginaw history," Saginaw High coach Julian Taylor said. "It really hasn't hit me yet that it's the last one. It's there in the back of our heads. TJ (Stevenson Jr.) posted a couple weeks ago that he's the last point guard in Saginaw High history, and that kind of makes it hit home.

"That's big to have it at the Dow. It's a big deal, showing what this program has meant to the community, what it's done for a lot of players. It's a big moment for all of us. For me, it's a big deal. I've always wanted the

opportunity to coach at the Civic Center or Dow Event Center. I watched my uncles play at the Civic Center in the mid-80s. I played there my sophomore and junior years, but I've never gotten to coach there."

While Feb. 16 is the final regular-season game between the two teams, it's not necessarily the final game between Arthur Hill and Saginaw High.

Arthur Hill dropped to Division 2 this season, putting the Lumberjacks in the same division as Saginaw High, which reached the Division 2 semifinals in 2023 before falling to eventual state champion Ferndale, 65-60.

They would have to win their district tournaments to have a chance to play again. Arthur Hill is playing in the Bay City John Glenn district, which includes John Glenn, Carrollton, Essexville Garber and Freeland. Saginaw High heads to the Mt. Morris district, which includes Mt. Morris, Birch Run, Clio, Bridgeport and Frankenmuth.

The district champions meet Tuesday, March 5, in a regional semifinal at Corunna High School.

"I hope that happens, just for the sake of the city," Arthur Hill coach Tony Davis said. "That would be awesome for everybody involved to have that one more game, one more tournament game. It would mean a lot. It would be a fitting end.

"This being the end probably won't hit me until that last game or when the season is completely over. It's a good feeling just knowing that I played and I coached at this school. This is history. We're moving forward. There will be no Arthur Hill High school. There will be no Saginaw High. When that last game comes, the feeling will be that this is it. It's done."

Arthur Hill begins the season at 6 p.m. Thursday with a home game against

Detroit Edison, with Saginaw High playing its first game at 4 p.m. Saturday at home against Westland John Glenn.

Both teams return a strong core of players, with the Trojans bringing back several top players from its semifinal team, including Stevenson, Brandon McCune, Ahijah Eichelberger and Deon Anderson. Arthur Hill's returnees include Lyna Brooks Jr., Dionquavis Hardy and Tyler Dorsey.

Both coaches have strong ties to the rivalry, playing and coaching in it.

"During homecoming, I kept thinking to myself that I literally lived this, been part of it all of my life," Taylor said. "I've watched it, played it, coached it. It's been a big part of my life."

Davis graduated from Arthur Hill in 1986 after starring for the Lumberjacks.

"It feels like I've always been a part of Arthur Hill basketball in some way, shape or form," Davis said. "After I was done playing, I coached with George Kubiak, then I coached with Dave Slaggert, then I coached with Greg McMath. Now I'm the head coach."

"We need this to be a big moment. We need this in the city to boost us up, get us fired up, get that old-school feeling of this is how we roll."

Slaggert has documented the history of the rivalry in a book, *Remembering the Trojans & the Lumberjacks*, which dates the start of the rivalry back to a 69-17 Saginaw High win over Arthur Hill in 1910.

"The state tournaments started in 1917, and in those 107 years, Saginaw High or Arthur Hill finished in the quarterfinals or better 47 times ... almost half," Slaggert said. "In those years, 36 times they made it to the semifinals and 18 times to the finals. And in two of those years, there weren't any tournaments."

Saginaw High has won six state championships, with Arthur Hill claiming two.

For fans wanting to pre-order the book, a form is available at saginawfoundation.org, using the Give Now drag-down menu with fans clicking on Remember the Trojans and the Lumberjacks. Cost is \$40, with \$12 shipping, with the book expected to be available in March after Slaggert adds a final chapter from the final game.

Tickets for the Feb. 16 game, called the Game of Legends, are \$12 for the general public. Saginaw Public School District students can buy a ticket, with wristband, for \$7.

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