

Lights, Skylights ready for an Argo invasion

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The Frontier Conference season is now underway, and the Montana State University-Northern men's and women's basketball teams are ready for a good old fashioned rivalry. On Saturday night, the Lights and Skylights will play host to the University of Great Falls in the conference home-openers for MSU-N. The Skylights play at 6 p.m. and the Lights take the floor at 8. For the Northern women, Saturday's battle with UGF will be about getting back in the win column. The Skylights (0-2, 9-9) dropped their conference openers at Wetsminster College and Lewis-Clark State last weekend, both by double digits. Both the Grif- fins and Warriors are ranked nationally right now, but MSU-N head coach Chris Mouat said his team could have needs to play better. "In either game we just didn't shoot the ball well enough," Mouat said. "I felt like we defended pretty well. We executed our defensive game plan very well both nights. But at the end of the day, we didn't do a good enough job on offense, and we need to get back to executing on both ends of the floor." And with that, Mouat means starting with the Argos. UGF (0-2, 3-11) may be sitting near the bottom of the Frontier so far this season, but Mouat knows, as always, UGF will play hard, and always plays Northern especially well. "We'll have our hands full with them," Mouat said. "They are relay very improved again this season. They have good weapons on offense, they have size and they can hurt you in multiple ways. They have done a lot to keep improving and we know it's going to be a really difficult game for us. "We're going to have to be better in all phases if we want to be competitive with them," he added. "But especially offensively. I'm real proud of the way we've played this year defensively. But against UGF we're going to have to do a better job on offense than we did our last two games." The Argos may only have three total wins this season, but like Mouat said, they have the talent to be much better than that. Shooting guard Kristy Henderson leads the league in scoring at just under 20 points per game, while teammates Leslie Saunders and Marissa Skogen also average in double figures. Guards Kassie Homlund and Marissa Francis also provide the Argos with plenty of scoring, and UGF can get it done both inside and from the perimeter. As for the Skylights, they too have a league leader. Senior Zivile Gaizutyte is leading the conference in rebounding at almost 11 boards per game to go along with her 12 points per outing. But Northern does most of its offensive damage with its guard combo of Samm Schermele (17 ppg) and Taylor Keller (11.3 ppg). However, the Skylights have been getting stronger in the paint in recent weeks. True freshman

Laci Keller is playing more and more and is doing a solid job rebounding and putting in shots when she gets her chance. And junior Katie Kuntz is coming off a strong performance at LC State last weekend, and has now scored in double figures in two of her last four games. And if the Skylights are to win on Saturday night, they'll have to have some balance on offense, as well as play their usual trademark defense. "It's going to be a difficult game," Mouat said. "It is always tough when Great Falls comes up here. Hopefully, we can play a good game for 40 minutes. That's what we need to do in order to be successful." MSU-N men's coach Shawn Huse is also needing a full 40 minutes from his Lights (1-1, 13-5) on Saturday night, much like they did in their impressive win at LC State last Saturday. The Lights split with Westminster and LC State on the road, and with a hungry UGF team coming to Havre on Saturday, Huse is hoping to see consistency from his team. "We have to start well this week," Huse said. "Because our first game, is our only game this week. And it's very important to win at home in this league. So we can't afford to start like we did against Westminster last week. We need to play well right away. If we do that, like we did at LC, we should be in good shape." Indeed, the Lights are coming off an impressive victory, and senior guard Andrew Sellars pumped in 25 points in the win over the Warriors. Sellars is having an outstanding senior season thus far, and its carried into league play. But he's getting plenty of help too. Justin Dennis is scoring nearly 15 points per game and point guard Eric Tisby is in double figures while leading the league in steals at nearly three thefts per outing. On the inside, the Lights are doing it by committee with seniors Walynn Burgess, Clay Greenland and Brian Santiago. Meanwhile, the Argos (0-2, 4-11) have played better than their record would indicate and that fact isn't lost on Huse or the Lights. Not to mention, it's taken UGF most of the season to get healthy and have its full compliment of players, and now that the Argos are at full strength, Huse knows that they are as capable as anyone in the league. And the fact that MSU-N hasn't lost to UGF in almost three years, and has a win over the Argos in a nonconference tournament this season, means nothing when it comes to Saturday night's tilt. "They are very talented," Huse said of the Argos. "This is a team, which without some of their key players, took Black Hills State (one of the best teams in the country) to overtime, and then last week, played LC really tough. "And now they have more of their scorers back," Huse added. "They are quick and can shoot, they defend well, and they have good size. They really are very balanced and it makes them difficult to defend." Sophomore guard Kevin Harris leads the Argos in scoring at just under 14 points per game. Junior Mark Celeya and senior forward Matt Niemeyer also combine to score 21 points per game, while players like Lukas Hamsch and Dyston Madsen have also filled roles nicely for head coach Steve Silsby's team. Still, UGF is young and while the Argos do have the talent, they haven't completely put it together this year. It's been especially difficult for UGF to replace two-time league scoring machine Rayshaun Ames. But Huse is still wary of the Argos, and he's hoping the Lights won't be the team UGF puts it all together against. "We have to play well, we have to do the things we're capable of doing," Huse said. "We need to play solid defense and take care of the basketball. Those are things we did really well last Saturday. If we can do that and control the boards better, we should be right there." Saturday's Frontier Conference action starts at 6 p.m. at the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse with the Skylights and UGF. The Lights and

Argos will play at 8 p.m. MSU-N is also home to face Montana Tech and UM-Western next weekend.