

Lights, Skylights face tough hoop schedules

(Created: Wednesday, August 5, 2009 12:33 PM MDT)

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In the NAIA, basketball starts early. The season is a marathon and not a sprint, and the upcoming 2009- 10 season for the Montana State University- Northern men's and women's basketball teams will be a long haul. This past week, the Lights and Skylights released their schedules for the upcoming season, and both ledgers are highlighted by a plethora of tough road games, with some challenging nonconference home games mixed in. For the fourth straight season, a Northern team will get a chance to play at famed Dahlberg Arena against a University of Montana foe. The MSU-N men will invade Missoula on Dec. 16. The game marks the third between the Lights and Grizzlies in the last four years, while the Skylights played against the Lady Griz last season. The MSU-N women will also take to the road against a state school, playing at Montana State for the second time in three years. The Skylights will meet the Bobcats on Dec. 6 in Bozeman. The Northern men open the season officially on Oct. 17 at the University of Regina. MSU-N plays its first home game Nov. 14 against Minot State University, a traditional NAIA DII powerhouse. The Lights, which went to the NAIA national tournament last season, have 17 nonconference games, including trips to tournaments at Montana Tech, Lewis-Clark State and the new Frontier Conference preview Tournament Dec. 4-5 in Butte. Northern will also play host to the AmericInn Classic Jan. 1-2. The tourney features Montana Tech, Dickinson State University and the University of Lethbridge on the men's side, while the women's tourney will showcase the Skylights, Carroll College, Minot State and Lethbridge. In all, the Northern men have just three home games (not including the AmericInn Classic) before the start of conference play. The MSU-N men, which won 20- plus games for the fifth straight season a year ago, and finished tied for second in the Frontier Conference, will open league play Jan. 7 at Westminster College in Salt Lake City. On the women's side, aside from tough trip to Bozeman, the Skylights will open their season with a top tier NAIA power for the second straight season. MSU-N will play host to Azusa Pacific Oct. 30 in Havre to officially get its season started. Like the men, the Skylights won't have many home games during the nonconference portion of their schedule. But they will have the MSUN Holiday Classic to bolster their schedule. That game will be against Concordia College in Havre. The Skylights will also make trips to tournaments in Great Falls, Olympia, Wash., and Butte during the nonconference season. Northern, which finished tied for second in the Frontier last season, will begin conference play Jan. 7 at Westminster College, and all of the men's and women's action will lead up to the Frontier Conference playoffs, which are slated to begin March 3. Havre fans can get a good look at the Lights and Skylights when they hold their annual Alumni games Oct. 17 in Havre.