If the Montana State University-Northern men’s basketball team was looking for a challenging start to Frontier Conference play, the Lights are going to get it tonight in Great Falls.

Northern (11-4) and rival Great Falls (7-8) open league play tonight at 8 at the McLaughlin Center, and while the Lights come to the Electric City red-hot, the Argos are playing some of their best basketball in years, and that makes tonight’s rivalry game very intriguing.

“This may be the best Great Falls team we've seen,” MSU-N head coach Shawn Huse said. “They are very skilled, quick, big, and athletic at every position. We know we have our work cut out for us.”

Indeed. The Argos are as skilled as any team in the Frontier, and this season, they seem to have some chemistry and continuity on the floor. A big part of that may be returning starters L.J. Jones and Melvin Williams, a pair of all-conference performers a year ago. But the Argos go much deeper than that. They will play up to seven guards during the course of a game, and all of them can score. Newcomer Mark Celaya leads four Argos in double figures at 16 points per game. And while the Argos don’t have the size of bigger teams, neither do the Lights, and that should make tonight’s affair very interesting.

Like UGF, Northern gets a lot offense from its guards. Shaun Tatarka, a former GFH star and Devin Jackson average identical 13 points per game nights, while LaVon Myers is right behind the duo at 12 points per game. And backup David Maddock is having a big first season, and is as deadly a 3-point shooter as the Lights have.

But with both teams capable of scoring, tonight’s rivalry game could come down to defense, and that’s something the Lights do very well. Northern is holding its opponents well under 40 percent from the field, and during its current four-game winning streak, only Black Hills State eclipsed the 50-point mark. Inside, Joe Simpson and Sean Kelly have been strong defensively, while Jordan Harris and Chris Brown, along with Ben Mitchell have been giving the Lights a lift off the bench.

And with Northern looking for yet another 20-win season and in search of a coveted NAIA tournament berth, the final stretch of that road starts tonight, but it’s a road Huse has been happy to watch his team take since August.

“I am very happy with where we are at right now,” Huse said. “This year’s team has zero returning starters from a year ago and zero Seniors. We have to be pleased with the success we’ve had thus far. Most importantly, our kids are playing good unselfish Lights Basketball. To have four guys averaging double-digits at this point, makes me happy about the chemistry that appears to be developing.”

Tonight’s Frontier Conference opener between the Lights and Argos tips off at 8 at the McLaughlin Center in Great Falls. The game can be heard locally on 92.5 KPQX FM.