One rival down: Lights take out Argos
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GREAT FALLS — The Montana State University-Northern men’s basketball team always gets up for playing the Great Falls Argos, and vice versa. Add to the fact that it’s always a homecoming game for Northern junior Shaun Tatarka, the Frontier Conference showdown makes for a special treat.

And on Friday night in Great Falls, Tatarka and the Lights didn’t disappoint, kicking off the 2011 Frontier Conference season with a 75-67 win over the Argos at the McLaughlin Center, sparked by Tatarka’s game-high 26 points.

The Lights showed good emotion early on, and that was a key to the game. Northern came out determined and focused and as a result, the Lights broke the first half open via a 22-3 run. The run was sparked by a three straight 3-pointers when the Lights were leading just 6-5. LaVon Myers hit the first long-range bomb and David Maddock came off the bench to drill back-to-back trey’s. Tatarka capped the run with the first of his three’s.

“I thought our defensive intensity and our energy at the start of the game was great,” Northern head coach Shawn Huse said. ‘Being on the road is always tough in this league, but our guys were ready to start conference play. They were ready at the start of the game and I thought our defensive effort really triggered us.

“And we were shooting at well of course,” he added. “We got good looks and our defense created good looks for us, and the guys knocked the shots down. So the start to the game and the start to the second half was really critical because Great Falls is a very good team and I have no doubt they will make some noise in our league this year.”

But as well as the Lights shot from the outside early on, UGF was ready to battle. The Argos kept the game manageable by going on 14-2 run late in the first stanza, and they cut Northern’s lead to 35-25 at intermission.

And while UGF did a similar job in cutting a big deficit late in the game, the Lights used another big spurt at the start of the second half to put things out of reach.

Tatarka hit a three to start the second-half and the Lights went on a 14-2 run and held UGF without a field goal during that stretch. By the time the 9:51 mark of the game rolled around, the Lights were ahead 59-43 and while the Argos played to the end, the Northern lead was too much to overcome.

Tatarka, the former Great Falls High star finished with 26 points on 10-of-17 shooting, and he also hit six 3-pointers, while dishing out three assists. The Lights, with Tatarka and Myers at the point also committed a season-low 11 turnovers.

“Shaun (Tatarka) was playing on another level,” Huse said. “He really was the catalyst for us on both ends of the floor. He show the ball very well at times, but on defense, he also did some big things for us.

“Being from Great Falls, you could see all week he was excited and ready to play this game,” he added. “And he showed great leadership for us leading up to the game and through the 40 minutes on the floor,
as he’s done all year. He had a great game and I’m sure playing in front of his home town really gave him even more energy and motivation.”

The Lights, who made a whopping 12 3-pointers and shot 45 percent from the floor, also got solid outings from Myers and Devin Jackson. Myers scored 15 points and hit two three’s as did Jackson, who also dished out four assists. Maddock also hit a pair of trey’s, while UGF got 15 points each from L.J. Jones and Melvin Williams in the losing cause.

The win over Great Falls put MSU-N at 1-0 in league play and 12-4 overall. But more importantly, it got the Lights off to the kind of start they were hoping for in conference play.

“We know we are fortunate to get out of Great Falls with a win and we’re excited about it,” Huse said. “Again, Great Falls is a very talented and skilled team and I have no doubt they are going to do some things in our league this season. So to leave their gym with win is big for us.”

The Lights return to the road next weekend with games at Montana Tech and UM-Western.

**Tark Sparks Lights**

*Northern is now 1-0 in Frontier play and 12-4 overall*

**Lights 75, UGF 67**

**MSU-N** — Ben Mitchell 1-3 0-0 2, Chris Brown 2-3 2-3 7, Sean Kelly 0-1 1-4 1, Joe Simpson 2-5 1-3 5, LaVon Myers 5-11 3-6 15, Shaun Tatarka 10-17 0-0 26, Jordan Harris 0-1 1-2 1, Devin Jackson 5-11 3-7 15, David Maddock 2-6 0-0 6. Totals 26-58 11-25 75

**UGF** — Melvin Williams 5-12 5-7 15, Lukas Hambsch 0-10 4-4 4, Marcel Towns 4-9 2-3 12, Naren Maynard 0-0 0-0 0, Tom Donnelly 0-0 0-0 0, Norman Towns 1-5 1-2 3, Mark Celaya 4-11 5-5 14, Dyston Madsen 2-4 0-0 4, Trevor Fehr 0-0 0-0 0, L.J. Jones 5-13 4-5 15. Totals 21-64 21-26 67

Halftime: MSU-N 35-25. 3-pt FG:MSU-N 12-30 (Brown 1-2, Myers 2-6, Tatarka 6-11, Jackson 2-6, Maddock 2-5), University of Great Falls 4-22 (Williams 0-3, Hambsch 0-8, Towns 2-3, Towns 0-2, Celaya 1-4, Jones 1-2). Rebounds: MSU-N 32 (Simpson 7, Myers 7), University of Great Falls 46 (Williams 10, Jones 10). Fouls MSU-N 22, University of Great Falls 17. Fouled out: Mitchell . Technical: none. Assists: MSU-N 9 (Jackson 4), University of Great Falls 6 (Williams 3). Steals: MSU-N 12 (Myers 5), University of Great Falls 5 (Towns 2). Blocked shots: MSU-N 3 (Simpson 2), University of Great Falls 5 (Williams 2, Madsen 2). Turnovers: MSU-N 11, University of Great Falls 18.