MSU-N men seek more road wins

George Ferguson, Havre Daily News sports editor
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Winning on the road is never easy in the Frontier Conference. However, it's also the key to successfully chasing down the Frontier crown, and while the Montana State University-Northern Lights already have a key road win under their belt, the mission is far from complete.

Tonight, the Lights (12-4, 1-0) take step two in the process when they visit Montana Tech in Butte. Northern wraps up a weekend swing at UM-Western on Saturday.

The Lights got off to a strong start in conference play with a hard-fought win over a much-improved UGF team last Friday in Great Falls. Northern was sparked by the hot shooting of former Great Falls prep star Shaun Tatarka, who scored a season-high 26 points against the Argos. Guard play has been critical to the Lights’ success this season, as sophomore Devin Jackson, and junior LaVon Myers and David Maddock have joined Tatarka as catalysts in Northern's loaded backcourt.

But this weekend, MSU-N will face two of the more post-oriented teams in the Frontier, so forwards Joe Simpson, Chris Brown, Sean Kelly, Devin Harris and Ben Mitchell will be needed more than ever.

Tonight’s game against the Orediggers (3-12, 1-1) might have seemed like a mismatch a week ago despite Tech’s size. The Orediggers start three 6-7 posts in senior Kellan Hasquet, Dirk Anderson and Ivan Sljivar. But it doesn’t look that way anymore. Tech shocked then sixth-ranked Westminster on a last-second 3-pointer by guard A.J. Paine in Salt Lake City, and while the Diggers’ have just four total wins this season, after the road win over the Griffins, and with a lineup that also includes Frontier Player of the Week Tyree Haynie, no one in the league, including the Lights can afford to overlook them.

“They just beat Westminster on their home floor,” MSU-N head coach Shawn Huse said. “I think that proved that once again this year, anybody can beat anybody in the ever-tough Frontier Conference, and Montana Tech is much better than a lot of people are giving them credit for. We know they are a good group and are not fooled whatsoever by their record. With the length, shooting ability and capability to play various styles, tempos, and defenses they present a very tough challenge for us. We're going to have to play very well on both ends if we expect to experience success on their floor.”

Of course the Lights will have to play well on Saturday night in Dillon. And when they take the floor against UM-Western (12-5, 0-2), they’ll be looking for a little payback. The Lights’ last Frontier loss came in the league semifinals last March at Western, and the win catapulted Western into the NAIA Tournament for the first time in over a decade. It also likely prevented Northern from making a second straight trip to Kansas City.

But as much as the Lights would like some revenge, both teams lost plenty to graduation last spring, and both are different squads this year. The Bulldogs got off to a fast start this fall, but dropped both of their league-opening games last weekend. Still, the talent at Western is there, especially with junior Brandon Brown, who leads the league in scoring at just over 20 points per game. Western’s size will also be a concern, especially transfer Kyle Perry, who stands 6-9, and University of Montana transfer Tyler Hurley (6-5).
“The Bulldogs have been playing a good level of basketball this year,” Huse said. “We need to find a way to contain all of their weapons. They get very good production from their point guard and the other four on the floor are indeed very formidable scorers. They do a good job of shooting the ball and don't need much space. It will be a huge challenge as they are capable of scoring in the paint as well.”

And while the Lights know they have to play well in order to win either game on the road this weekend, they also know what road wins would mean towards their postseason hopes. So, while it’s still early in league play, the games at Tech and Western are very critical to the what happens the rest of the way.

Tonight’s game between Tech and MSU-N tips off at 7:30 in Butte. Saturday’s game at Western tips off at 7:30 p.m., and both games can be heard locally on 92.5 KPQX FM.

### Frontier Conference
### Men’s Standings

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**Tonight’s Games**

- UGF at UM-Western
- MSU-Northern at Montana Tech

**Saturday’s Games**

- UGF at Montana Tech
- MSU-Northern at UM-Western
- LC State at Carroll
- Westminster at Rocky Mountain