Lights outlast Bears
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One win looked easy. But getting a home Frontier Conference sweep was anything but for the Montana State University-Northern men’s basketball team.

Just one night after the Lights demolished nationally-ranked Carroll College, the Rocky Mountain College Battlin’ Bears’ made life very difficult for Northern. Still, MSU-N found a way to gut out a 55-52 win over the Bears and take full of advantage of their only home stand in January.

But Saturday night’s win at the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse didn’t come without some tense moment, unlike Friday’s route of the Saints. Against Carroll, Northern shot 55 percent from the floor, but against the Bears, the Lights went as icy as the streets outside – until Devin Jackson rose up and made one big shot.

With the Lights trailing 49-46 with just 2:12 left in the game, and the Bears threatening to undo any momentum Northern had built of from the Carroll victory, Jackson shrugged of Northern’s shooting woes and nailed a critical three to tie the game. It was the first of many critical plays by the super sophomore down the stretch, all of which allowed the Lights to come back and win. On Northern’s next possession, Jackson took the ball hard to the basket with the shot clock winding down, got fouled and made a free throw to put the Lights up one. The game was far from over, but the play gave the Lights some much-needed momentum, and on Rocky’s ensuing possession, Northern junior David Maddock made a key defensive play which forced a Bear turnover, and allowed the Lights to salt the game away at the foul line.

“I don’t think we’ve ever had a night where all four of our main guards were off at the same time,” Northern head coach Shawn Huse said. “But it happened to us tonight. But that’s also where you have to give all of our guys a ton of credit, because they hung in there when the shots weren’t falling, and somehow, through our defense, our effort and a few really smart plays down the stretch, we found a way to still win the game.”

Jackson’s late heroics were part of a monumental struggle with the Bears all night. Northern seemed to seize control midway through the first half after Sean Kelly nailed a three to put the Lights up 10. But RMC’s 6-9 powerhouse, Sergio Trocha scored eight straight points and blocked five Northern shots to bring the Bears back. Only a Ben Mitchell shot at the end of the half gave the Lights a slim 27-25 advantage.

“I think we were certainly a little tired and a little flat emotionally after the Carroll game,” Huse said. “And with Rocky coming in here playing with a lot of energy, it just felt like we couldn’t match that intensity. I thought we had a chance to pull away from them in the first half, but we just didn’t have the energy to sustain it. So that’s where I give our guys a lot of credit, because they really gutted it out and found ways to stay in it, even when we weren’t at our best.”

And the Lights certainly had to gut it out at the end. Joe Simpson kept battling for the Lights in the second half and finished the game with a double-double, while Maddock was also instrumental in helping Northern
stay in the fight. Still, the Bears clawed their way to the 49-46 lead via a 13-5 run, setting up the dramatic finish.

Simpson finished the game with 14 points and 10 rebounds, while Jackson added 13 points and LaVon Meyers scored nine. But the Lights shot just 33 percent from the field and went a dismal 7-for-26 from three. Still, Northern’s defense and its will to win carried the Lights to victory as the Bears didn’t fare much better from the floor. E.J. Ross and Trocha led RMC with 18 and 15 points, respectively.

“Joe Simpson had a great game for us,” Huse said. “He really made some big plays on both ends when we needed them. And I thought David Maddock and Ben Mitchell really gave us a lift off the bench and we needed it because we weren’t shooting it like we’re capable of. Our bench did some really good things for us tonight.

“It was a tough game, especially coming on the heels of such an emotional win,” Huse said. “But we’ll take it. You have to win games like this to be successful in our league. So I’m really proud of the way we pulled together and got another big win.”

With a weekend sweep in tow, the Lights (15-5) will now embark on their toughest road trip of the season. Northern heads to Westminster College on Thursday night and LC State on Saturday night.

Lights 55, Rocky Mountain 52

**RMC** — Sergio Trocha 6-9 3-6 15, Joel Barndt 0-1 1-2 1, Matt Fogarty 2-5 0-0 4, Mark Desin 1-2 0-0 3, EJ Ross 8-16 0-0 18, Kale Eike 1-1 4-4 6, Philip Barndt 0-0 0-0 0, Jordan Strecker 0-1 1-2 1, Orlandor Westbrooks 0-3 4-4 4, Anthony Carter 0-4 0-0 0, Joe Stulc 0-2 0-0 0. Totals 18-44 13-18 52.

**MSU-N** — David Maddock 1-4 0-0 3, Devin Jackson 4-11 1-2 13, Jordan Harris 1-2 0-0 2, Shaun Tatarka 1-12 2-3 4, LaVon Myers 2-10 4-6 9, Joe Simpson 7-10 0-0 14, Sean Kelly 1-3 2-2 5, Chris Brown 1-2 1-2 3, Ben Mitchell 1-3 0-0 2. Totals 19-57 10-15 55.

Halftime: MSU-N 27-25. 3-pt FG:RMC 3-12 (Fogarty 0-1, Desin 1-1, Ross 2-5, Westbrooks 0-1, Carter 0-3, Stulc 0-1), MSU-N 7-26 (Maddock 1-3, Jackson 4-9, Tatarka 0-9, Myers 1-3, Simpson 0-1, Kelly 1-1). Rebounds: RMC 36 (Trocha 10), MSU-N 32 (Simpson 10). Fouls RMC 17, MSU-N 17. Fouled out: Trocha. Technical: none. Assists: RMC 1 (Desin 1), MSU-N 5 (Maddock 1, Harris 1, Tatarka 1, Simpson 1, Kelly 1). Steals: RMC 0, MSU-N 5 (Tatarka 1, Myers 1, Simpson 1, Kelly 1, Mitchell 1). Turnovers: RMC 11, MSU-N 5.