LC State stops MSU-N

George Ferguson, Havre Daily News sports editor
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Getting off to a good start on the road is something the Montana State University-men’s basketball team knows is important.

But Thursday night in Lewiston, Idaho, the No. 19 Lights didn’t do that. Instead, Northern fell behind host Lewis-Clark State right away, and the result was a 70-61 Frontier Conference road loss.

David Maddock hit a 3-pointer at the 15:46 mark to put the Lights up 9-6. However, LC’s defense kept the Lights scoreless for the next 8:42 of the game while the Warriors went on a 15-0 run. That put LC ahead 23-9 with less than seven minutes remaining in the opening half.

The Warriors built the lead to 16 points before it settled for a 35-21 halftime lead behind Alex King’s inside dominance. The 6-6 powerhouse had a double-double by halftime and finished the game with 15 points and 11 rebounds.

Despite trailing big at the half, Northern did mount a comeback. In the second half, the Warriors took a 39-22 lead early, but the Lights answered with an 11-2 run to cut the deficit to eight. After LCSC pushed the lead up to 13, the Lights used another run and made it 51-50 with 8:08 left.

However, the Lights couldn’t get over the hump. The team had only nine players and couldn’t stop LCSC inside. Junior post Donte Roberts scored on back-to-back possessions for LCSC and King hit a free throw for a 5-0 run to make it 56-50. LCSC got the lead to eight, but a couple of Warrior turnovers helped MSU-Northern cut the margin to 62-59 with two minutes remaining.

LCSC responded by closing out the game hitting 6-of-8 free throws and Warrior senior guard Jared Giammona put the exclamation point on the win when the 6-footer dunked the ball for the first time in his career at the final buzzer.

Ben Mitchell had 13 points and five boards to lead the Lights, while Joe Simpson had 11 points and eight boards despite missing almost the entire first half with two quick fouls. MSU-Northern was 24-of-53 for 45.3 percent, including 5-of-22 from the arc, for 22.7 percent. Jeray Key added 13 points for LCSC, while David Johnson and Giammona had 10 each. Giammona also had five assists and a steal.

The loss dropped Northern back into a three-way tie for first place in the Frontier Conference standings. The Lights are 4-2 in league play and 15-6 overall. MSU-N will look to bounce back on Saturday night in Salt Lake City, but it won’t be easy as the Lights take on No. 23 Westminster College.

The Lights return home for a game against the University of Great Falls on Feb. 5.