MSU-Northern men race past Argos
George Ferguson, Havre Daily News sports editor
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One game at a time. That’s been the battle cry for the Montana State University-Northern men’s basketball team, and the Lights showed why against the University of Great Falls.

On Saturday night at the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse in Havre, the Lights put two tough road losses last weekend behind them by methodically taking apart the UGF Argos, 68-62.

The win over UGF kept the Lights within a half game of first place in the jam-packed Frontier Conference standings, and it also completed another mission – taking care of business at home.

“You have to credit UGF,” Northern head coach Shawn Huse said. “They came ready to play. They really battled hard, especially defensively. But I think if there was something we did really, really well tonight, it’s that we were even better defensively. They are a very good offensive team, they’ve beaten some very good teams on the road this season, and they probably will win some more big games before the season is over. But tonight, we were very good defensively. We came ready to play and that was the difference.”

The Lights are always good defensively, but they had been in a shooting slump coming into Saturday night’s game with the Argos. However, as good shooting teams often do, the Lights turned things around with a 12-for-25 performance from the 3-point-line. And despite a game-high 24 points from UGF’s L.J. Jones, the Argos couldn’t play catch up when the Lights are shooting like they were on Saturday night.

Devin Jackson knocked down two important treys to help stake the Lights to a 32-22 halftime lead. Then in the second half, Shaun Tatarka started to heat up. Tatarka hit two triples as the shot clock expired as Northern went on a 15-3 run to extend the lead to 57-43 with less than five minutes to play.

And three’s played a key role in icing the game, as even forward Ben Mitchell got into the act, hitting one of three MSU-N long-range bombs in final three minutes to stick a dagger in the Argos for good.

“We did shot it well tonight,” Huse said. “And we hadn’t been shooting it like we’re capable of the last few games. But that’s what shooters do, they have to kind of fight through that, and we were able to make some shots tonight.

“But I still think the game was won on the defensive end, and on the boards,” he added. “We only let them get one clean look at a three all night and we did a great job of battling on the boards against a very physical team. Our guards did a great job of helping out rebounding, and I just thought our effort was tremendous. The guys came ready to play and I was really proud of our effort tonight.”

Jackson paced the Lights with 20 points. Tatarka went for 17 points and four triples, while LaVon Myers added 12 points. Jackson, Mitchell, David Maddock and Joe Simpson all grabbed five rebounds a piece and the MSU-N defense forced the Argos into 16 turnovers.
With the win, the Lights earned a season-sweep over the Argos for the fourth straight year. The Lights also improved to 5-3 in the conference and 17-7 overall. Northern is just a half game behind league-leading UM-Western in the conference standings and the Bulldogs, along with Montana Tech, come to Havre this weekend. The Lights face Western on Friday night and Tech on Saturday.

“I feel like we took another good step tonight,” Huse said. “We played well and we were excited to be at home. So now we just have to go back to work and get ready for two more tough teams next weekend.”

The three's fall for the Lights

Lights 68, UGF 52

**UGF** — Tom Donnelly 0-0 0-0 0, JayTee Tarpley 0-0 0-0 0, Dyston Madsen 0-2 0-0 0, Mark Celaya 3-7 4-5 10, Norman Towns 0-0 2-2 2, L.J. Jones 10-18 3-4 24, Lukas Hambsch 1-3 1-2 3, Brandon Boka 0-0 0-0 0, Naren Maynard 1-2 0-0 2, Marcel Towns 3-5 3-5 9, Melvin Williams 0-4 2-2 2. Totals 18-41 15-20 52

**MSU-N** — David Maddock 2-3 0-0 6, Devin Jackson 7-13 2-2 20, Jordan Harris 1-2 0-0 2, Shaun Tatarka 6-12 1-3 17, LaVon Myers 4-7 3-3 12, Joe Simpson 2-6 0-2 4, Sean Kelly 0-1 0-0 0, Chris Brown 1-1 2-2 4, Ben Mitchell 1-2 0-0 3. Totals 24-47 8-12 68