Lights cage Battlin’ Bears  
Planned "Black Out" for Saturday’s semifinal game against Western  
George Ferguson, Havre Daily News sports editor  
Thursday, March 3rd, 2011  

The Rocky Mountain College Battlin’ Bears had a little bite to them, but the Montana State University-Northern Lights had the fire.  

The No. 22 Lights hit 12 3-pointers, had a balanced, five guys in double figures and made 11 of 13 shots to start Wednesday night’s 91-68 Frontier Conference quarterfinal win over the Bears at the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse.  

The Lights put on a clinical offensive display and the Bears just couldn’t keep up as Northern torched the nets to the tune of 56 percent shooting from the floor and 52 percent from three. And the end result was not just a blowout win over Rocky, but a date with the third-seeded UM-Western Bulldogs in Saturday night’s semifinals.  

“We came out with a lot of intensity,” Northern junior forward Joe Simpson said. “This was a big game, they are all big games from here on out. So we knew we had to come out and play like it right away, and the whole team did that tonight. We had great intensity right from jump.”  

“This may have been our best offensive game of the season,” MSU-N head coach Shawn Huse added. “And to tell you the truth, we needed it. Because as hard and as well as I thought we played defensively tonight, we never really had an answer for Rocky on the offensive end. They (Bears) played great.”  

“So the start we got off to was huge, and we needed our offense to be our best defense tonight, and luckily for us, it was.”  

The Lights started the game on fire and never really cooled off. And though the Bears got a scintillating 28 points from senior E.J. Ross, Northern’s entire team had the hot hand throughout.  

Devin Jackson opened the game with a trademark three, and the Lights were off and running. Shaun Tatarka, LaVon Myers and David Maddock also got into the deep-shooting act as Northern poured in seven long-range bombs in the first 20 minutes. And the Lights were equally adept going inside as Simpson seemed to find space in the paint all night long, even against Rocky’s bigger front line.  

“We came out with a defensive intensity,” Myers said. “The whole team played great pressure ‘D’ in the first half and that fed our offense. It was a great start to the game, and the whole team played great.”  

And MSU-N kept on playing great.  

The Bears made a couple of runs at the Lights in the second half, cutting the lead to 13 points with 10:21 to play. But Myers kept pouring in three’s, as did Tatarka, and Northern pushed the lead back to 20 points with 7:38 to go. Tatarka netted two more triples and Rocky’s (11-19) season was put into hibernation as a result.
In all, five Lights got into double figures with Myers scoring a team-high 20, including four three’s. The junior guard also dished out five assists. Tatarka was feeling it all night as well, hitting five bombs on his way to 19 points, as well as four assists. Jackson added 12 points and Maddock came off the bench to chip in with 11 points.

Meanwhile, Simpson had another big game on both ends of the floor, scoring 16 points and grabbing five rebounds. He also held RMC center Sergio Trocha to just eight points and seven rebounds. Trocha came in averaging a double-double this season. But it was two points Simpson had taken away which brought the large Northern crowd to their feet. Simpson was on the receiving end of a steal and he went straight at RMC freshman Joe Stulc, throwing down a thunderous one-handed dunk right on top of the former Winifred standout. Simpson was called for an offensive foul, but the highlight reel dunk epitomized the kind of night the Lights had.

“It was a great way to start the playoffs,” Simpson, the Pittsburg, Calif., native said. “We enjoy every win and we are going to enjoy this one. But we’re not satisfied. We know we have more big games in front of us, so we have to be ready to play like this again. We have to stay focused.

“I think the stat sheet indicates what an unselfish team we have,” Huse said. “Everybody contributed tonight and it wasn’t just scoring. We got rebounds, steals, hustle plays, bench points, all night this whole team played unselfishly and they were really on the same page. And that’s what you have to have to keep advancing in these playoffs. This team is playing like a veteran Frontier Conference team right now, not a rookie Frontier Conference team, and I’m just really proud of them. This team, every guy on this team just continues to impress me.”

And advance the Lights did, in impressive fashion. However, Northern (22-8) has another hurdle to climb on Saturday when arch rival UM-Western comes to town to challenge the Lights for a berth in Monday’s conference championship game. The Bulldogs (22-8) and Lights split during the regular season, and have developed quite a rivalry the last three years. And Saturday night’s game is a rematch of last year’s semifinal, won by Western in the final seconds in Dillon.

“We have been focused on playing one game at a time all year,” Myers said. “That’s all you can do is worry about the game you’re playing in the moment. So all we’re focused on right now is this next game. Nothing else matters.”

Saturday’s Frontier semifinal between the Lights and Bulldogs tips off at 7 p.m. at the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse. Carroll College and Westminster will meet in the other semifinal Saturday night in Helena. Tickets for Northern’s semifinal game go on sale today.

Lights 91, Rocky Mountain 68

RMC – Joel Barndt 4-8 1-2 10, Sergio Trocha 4-7 0-0 8, Anthony Carter 2-3 0-0 4, E.J. Ross 12-23 1-1 28, Jordan Strecker 1-1 0-0 2, Kale Eike 1-2 1-2 3, Mark Desin 1-5 2-3 5, Matt Fogarty 2-6 2-2 6, Joe Stulc 0-0 2-2 2. Totals: 27-56 10-13 68.

MSU-N – Sean Kelly 1-2 0-0 2, Joe Simpson 7-10 2-3 16, Devin Jackson 4-6 2-2 12, Shaun Tatarka 6-13 2-2 19, LaVon Myers 7-12 2-2 20, David Maddock 3-7 4-4 11, Jordan Harris 1-3 0-0 2, Chris Brown 1-1 3-4 5, Ben Mitchell 2-3 0-0 2. Totals: 32-57 15-17.

Halftime: Northern 53-32. 3-pointers: RMC 4-16 (Ross 3, Desin 1), MSU-N 12-23 (Jackson 2, Tatarka 5, Myers 4, Maddock 1). Rebounds: RMC 23 (Trocha 7), MSU-N 32 (Kelly 5, Simpson 5, Jackson 5, Tatarka 5). Foul: RMC 12, MSU-N 12. Fouled out: None.