Lights draw California’s Biola
George Ferguson, Havre Daily News sports editor
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When it comes to the NAIA national men’s basketball tournament, teams have to go in blind most times. First-round opponents are generally very unfamiliar with each other.

Luckily for the 19th-ranked Montana State University-Northern Lights, that’s been the case almost all season long, so the Lights first-round game with 13th-ranked Biola University next Thursday night in Kansas City won’t be all that different to what the Frontier Conference champion Lights have been facing all year. With so many new Lights, this season has been about playing one unfamiliar opponent after another.

“Our guys, being so new this year and having just two players who have ever played in our league before this season, have been pretty good about facing teams blind this season,” Northern head coach Shawn Huse said shortly after the Lights learned they’ll be facing the Eagles at 8:45 p.m. M.S.T. next Thursday in Kansas City in the first round of the NAIA national tournament. “Most of our guys have never seen this conference before and they did pretty well. So we’ll prepare like we always do, we’ll get as much information on Biola as we can, but at the end of the day, this is another brand new team to us.”

Wednesday night’s announcement of the brackets for the national tournament saw the Lights miss out on garnering one of the 16 seeds, while Biola is seeded 13th. Therefore, the NAIA determined the MSU-N/Biola matchup is a fairly even draw. The Lights and Eagles are in Bracket No. 2 which is the bottom section of the top half of the draw. The winner of the Northern/Biola game will advance to the second round on Friday night against either fourth-seeded LSU-Shreveport or Life College out of Georgia.

Biola comes to the national tournament as an at-large team from the Golden State Athletic Conference. The California league is widely considered the top league in all of NAIA Division I. The Eagles went 26-5 this season and 16-4 in conference play. They have two common opponents with the Lights in fellow GSAC members Azusa Pacific and Vanguard University.

“We’ll scout and learn as much as we can about them,” Huse said. “But we know their record, we know the league they play in, so we already have a healthy respect for what they’ve done this season. But we won’t fear them either. Our guys are excited and ready to go.”

The NAIA tourney will feature three Frontier Conference teams, just as it did two years ago when the Lights made their last appearance. As expected, Carroll College received an at-large berth and will face 11th-seeded Union of Tennessee on Wednesday night at 9:30 p.m. M.S.T. The UM-Western Bulldogs were on the bubble after their loss to Northern in last Saturday’s semifinal round, but the Bulldogs are in the NAIA tournament for the second straight year. Western was the final at-large team taken, and will square off against top-seeded and No. 1-ranked Robert Morris next Wednesday afternoon.
Northern will open play at the tournament, which takes in Kansas City’s Municipal Auditorium, next Thursday night at 8:45 p.m. against Biola. The Lights leave for Kansas City on Monday, but there will be a rally and send-off tonight from 6-8 p.m. on the Northern campus.

**Lights take on Biola**

**in NAIA Round One**

**March 17, 8:45 P.M.**

**Biola University Quick Facts**

**Location:** La Mirida, Calif.

**Conference:** Golden State Athletic

**Record:** 26-5 overall, 16-4 conference

**NAIA:** At-Large No. 2, No. 13 Seed

**Head Coach:** Dave Holmquist

**Common Opponents With Lights:** Lost to Azusa Pacific twice, Lights lost to Azusa; Defeated Vanguard twice, Lights lost to Vanguard.