

MSU-N hoops hits the floor Saturday

Lights, Skylights host King's University

George Ferguson

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It's only early October, but college basketball season is here. At least in Havre.

Saturday afternoon, the Montana State University-Northern men's and women's basketball teams will kick off the 2011-12 season with games against the King's University of Edmonton, Alberta. The Skylights play at 3 p.m. and the Lights tip off at 5.

The Northern women will debut a new-look team Saturday. The Skylights return just two starts in seniors Laramie Schwenke and Jordan Bruursema, and just five players with playing experience at MSU-N. Junior Kylee Denham saw plenty of playing time a year ago, while center Laci Keller, a Big sandy product returns from injury after starting several games a true freshman two seasons ago.

Northern also returns seventh-year head coach Chris Mouat. And he says his team will certainly have a new look this year.

"We're very young and very inexperienced as a team," Mouat said. "But we do have some kids back who have been in our program for a while now. And we'll lean on those kids early on as our team kind of finds itself. It's going to be a challenge, it's going to be tough considering how many new players we have this year. But we do have a lot of kids who will step up and do a good job for us."

"We don't know a lot about them (Eagles)," Mouat said. "But we expect our kids to go in and play hard right away. We want to be solid on defense and rebounding right away. And we'll lean on our experienced kids while the entire team kind of gets their feet wet."

Northern men's head coach Shawn Huse is in a different situation heading into Saturday's opener with the Eagles. The Lights return every player from last year's roster, a team which won a Frontier Conference championship, went to the NAIA national tournament and won 24 games.

"I'm expecting more out of this first game than I would in most other years," Huse said. "That's a benefit of returning a team like we do, coming off a season like we had last year. We're still expecting Northern basketball, hard work, unselfish play and good all-around effort, but also, we're expecting them to execute well right away. To play at a higher level right away."

"Still, this team (King's) is an unknown to us," he added. "So that makes it a little more difficult to prepare for a season opener. But certainly, with the team we have coming back, we're holding them to a higher standard for a first game than maybe we normally would."



MSU-Northern guard LaVon Myers (right) will help lead the Lights into their season-opener against King's University Saturday night in Havre. The Skylights also play King's at 3 p.m.