

Lights wallop Eagles in opener

George Ferguson

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There are high expectations surrounding the Montana State University-Northern men's basketball team entering the 2011-12 season. Even Northern head coach Shawn Huse said he was holding his team to a higher standard as far as season-openers go, mainly because the Lights returned every player from last year's Frontier Conference championship team.

On Saturday afternoon at the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse, the Lights lived up to that standard. Northern opened the season by dismantling King's University, 91-28 at the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse.

And the Lights did it in crisp and decisive fashion.

"Mostly, I'm really pleased," Huse said. "I thought, as far as an opener goes, we're well ahead of where we are at most years. I thought we did a really good job of executing on both ends of the floor, and we played as well as I expected us to."

The Lights put up 91 points in 40 minutes of basketball, but it was defense which overwhelmed the Eagles right from the start.

The Lights forced the Eagles into 36 turnovers and held them to just 10 first-half points. As a team, the Eagles shot just 28 percent from the floor as MSU-N harassed the King's guards all game long. The Eagles made just two 3-pointers as well, and they turned the ball over 19 times in first 16 minutes of the game.

That suffocating defense from the onset allowed Northern to get out in transition early on, and that, combined with a hot-shooting start was just too much for the Edmonton, Alberta squad to handle.

"I thought our guys came out ready to play," Huse said. "We had a lot of intensity on defense, and our effort for 40 minutes was very good. I was really pleased with our defensive effort tonight. The whole team played very hard."

Seniors Shaun Tatarka and LaVon Myers combined to knock down four three's in the first eight minutes and run-out layups by Sean Kelly and Joe Simpson off steals helped Northern stake an insurmountable 30-4 lead with 11:51 left in the first half. The defensive intensity was kept up all the way through as the Lights led 56-10 at halftime.

Saturday's game wasn't just a blowout, it was also an opportunity for the Lights to expand playing time. Newcomers Baird Henning and Big Sandy's Corbin Pearson both saw extensive minutes with Pearson leading the Lights with eight rebounds. Henning, Pat Jensen and red shirt sophomore Mike LaValley all played well and Huse said it was a good opportunity for those four to get their feet wet.

"I can't say enough about the contributions those four guys made," Huse said. "They all got a good amount of minutes tonight and I thought they all did a really good job when they were in there. This was a good way for them to get in get acclimated to what we do, and all of those guys did a really good job."



Northern senior LaVon Myers (left) lays in a shot during the first half of Saturday's men's basketball game at the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse.



Montana State University-Northern senior Jordan Harris (left) goes in for a layup during Saturday's season-opening game between the Lights and King's University in Havre.

As a team, Northern shot a solid 54 percent from the field. The Lights made 14-of-34 three's with Tatarka hitting seven triples and scoring a game-high 23 points. Myers added 12 points and junior Devin Jackson chipped in with 10. The Lights also got nine points and six boards from Simpson, and eight points and seven rebounds from Jordan Harris.

The Lights also out rebounded the Eagles 34-31 and turned the ball over just 11 times, an efficient performance according to Huse.

"Really pleased," Huse said. "I just thought we came out ready to go and our guys took care of business. We're not where we need to be, and we know that. It's still early, but I feel really good about how we played for a first game."

Northern (1-0) will now play its next 11 games away from Havre. The two-month road trip starts this weekend with a trip to Regina, Saskatchewan on Friday for a game against CIS power the University of Regina. The Lights also play University of Saskatchewan Saturday in Saskatoon.

Lights sharp right away

Lights 91, King's University 28

KU--- Shawn Owens 0-1 0-0 0, Ben Battjes 1-5 0-2 2, Dillon Knoll 0-1 0-0 0, Keith Marshall 0-2 0-0 0, Mackenzie Stobbart 2-2 0-0 4, Tyler Fournier 0-2 0-0 0, Keaven Simes 0-0 0-0 0, Kevin Lewis 0-5 2-2 2, Phill Wilson 2-3 0-0 6, Craig Batterham 0-5 0-0 0, Damian Yeboah 3-6 0-0 6, Spencer Grove 3-6 2-3 8. Totals 11-38 4-7 28.

MSU-N — David Maddock 2-6 0-2 6, Devin Jackson 3-10 2-2 10, Jordan Harris 4-5 0-1 8, Shaun Tatarka 8-13 0-0 23, LaVon Myers 4-7 2-2 12, Sean Kelly 3-4 0-0 6, Mike LaValley 2-7 0-0 5, Joe Simpson 4-5 1-3 9, Ben Mitchell 2-4 0-0 4, Pat Jensen 1-2 0-0 2, Baird Henning 1-1 1-4 3, Corbin Pearson 1-1 1-2 3. Totals 35-65 7-16 91.

Halftime: MSU-N 56-10; 3-pt FG: KU 2-5 (Wilson 2-3, Yeboah 0-1, Grove 0-1), MSU-N 14-34 (Maddock 2-6, Jackson 2-7, Tatarka 7-11, Myers 2-2, Kelly 0-1, LaValley 1-5, Simpson 0-1, Mitchell 0-1). Rebounds: The KU 31 (TEAM 9), MSU-N 34 (Pearson 8). Fouls: KU14, MSU-N 14. Fouled out: none. Technical: none. Assists: The Kings University 0, MSUN Lights 20 (Maddock 5, Tatarka 5).