Lights split games against top Canadian teams

George Ferguson
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The Montana State University-Northern men’s basketball team was ready to be challenged early in the season. And the Lights got that and then some on their trip to Regina and Saskatoon, Saskatchewan this past weekend.

Northern opened its two-game road swing north of the border against two of the top CIS (Canada’s Division I) teams in all of the Canada with a hard-fought 80-72 win over Regina on Friday night. On Saturday night, the Lights were locked in another hard-fought battle in Saskatoon, and they were downed the University of Saskatchewan Huskies, 80-75 in overtime. The Huskies were a CIS Final Four Team a year ago.

“As much as I would have liked to see us find a way to win the second game, I can’t say I’m disappointed or displeased with the way we played this weekend,” Northern head coach Shawn Huse said. “These were two very good basketball teams we faced up there, two teams who would for sure do very well in our league. They were tough very good opponents, both of which gave us all we wanted.

“And I thought our kids played very well, played very hard both nights,” he continued. “It was a tough adjustment for them, with all of the different rules and things, and then to go up against two big, physical and very talented teams, I was proud of how we played.”

The Lights had to battle all night with both teams, but on Friday night, it was some timely shooting and rebounding which propelled Northern to a hard-fought win over the Cougars. The Lights trailed 16-14 at the end of the first quarter but they wrestled the lead away just before half and held a five-point edge at the break.

David Maddock’s 18 points and 6-of-10 performance from beyond the arc turned out to be a huge factor, as did the 18 points by Devin Jackson and the hard-fought 12 points by Joe Simpson. Chris Brown gave the Lights a big lift off the bench with eight points and a game-high 12 rebounds, while LaVon Myers had 13 points. Brown, Simpson, Sean Kelly and Jordan Harris also did well to defend the bigger Cougars.

“David Maddock really figured it out for us,” Huse said. “It’s a shorter shot clock and he really got us going with his shooting. I thought all of our guys did a really good job on defense too. They (Cougars) have good size, like always and we did a real good job of playing defense in the paint. It was a good all-around effort.”

The Lights were up against an even more skilled team on Saturday night, and had chances to win late in regulation against the Huskies. Northern played the Huskies in Havre several years ago and won in overtime. The Lights trailed 44-42 at the half and the game stayed close to the end. But in the extra frame, the Huskies outscored the Lights 10-5 for the final margin.

“They (Huskies) are a very talented team with one of the best guards in all of Canada and they have good size too,” Huse said. “So it was a big challenge for our team. We had a few chances though we didn’t have the lead for more than a couple of minutes the entire game. But I thought we really battled hard and I was really proud of our effort.”

Senior Shaun Tatarka scored a team-high 25 points, including six three’s. Jackson added 14 points and Maddock was in double figures for the second straight night, scoring 10. The Lights were out-rebounded by the Huskies 41-32, and Northern went just 14-of-42 from three.
“They were two very tough road games,” Huse said. “Two really good opponents for us. I was pleased for the most part with how we played and executed both nights against some pretty tough circumstances. So now we’ll just go back to work and get ready for more tough challenges on the road.”

The Lights return to action Oct. 28-29 when they play two games at the UM-Western Tournament in Dillon.

**Lights 80, Regina 72**

MSU-N — Devin Jackson 6-16 2-2 18, Shaun Tatarka 0-6 0-0 0, LaVon Myers 3-9 5-6 13, Sean Kelly 2-6 2-2 6, Joe Simpson 5-9 4-6 12, David Maddock 6-10 0-0 18, Jordan Harris 1-3 0-0 2, Mike LaValley 1-1 0-0 3, Chris Brown 4-9 0-3 8, Corbin Pearson 0-0 0-0 0. Totals: 28-69 11-17 80.

Halftime: 33-28 Northern. 3-point field goals: 13-29 (Jackson 4-9, Myers 2-4, Maddock 6-9, LaValley 1-1); Rebounds: 45 (Brown 12); Assists 19 (Myers 6); Fouls 23; Fouled out: Kelly.

**U of Saskatchewan 80, Lights 75 (OT)**

MSU-N — Devin Jackson 5-16 0-1 14, Shaun Tatarka 8-20 3-3 25, LaVon Myers 2-10 2-2 8, Sean Kelly 3-5 0-0 6, Joe Simpson 1-7 4-4 6, David Maddock 3-6 2-2 10, Jordan Harris 2-6 0-0 4, Mike LaValley 0-0 0-0 0, Chris Brown 1-4 0-0 2, Baird Henning 0-0 0-0 0. Totals: 25-74 11-12 78.

Halftime: 44-42 Saskatchewan; 3-point field goals: 14-42 (Jackson 4-11, Tatarka 6-18, Myers 2-9, Maddock 2-4); Rebounds: 32 (Simpson 8); Assists 18 (Myers 9); Fouls: 20; Fouled out: None.