Lights earn hard-fought sweep in Dillon

George Ferguson
Sunday, October 30th, 2011

It wasn't easy. But the Montana State University-Northern men's basketball team grabbed two more early-season wins on the road.

The Lights played at the UM-Western tournament this weekend, and beat future Frontier Conference rival Dickinson State 74-68 on Friday afternoon, and Cascade Conference powerhouse Warner-Pacific, 61-60 on Saturday night.

In both games, the Lights played well and built solid first-half leads, only to see two strong teams challenge them in the second half.

Against the Blue Hawks, Northern was ahead 38-24 at intermission, but Dickinson rallied in the second half. Still, the Lights showed resiliency down the stretch and held on for the win, despite shooting just 6-for-23 from beyond the 3-point-line.

Joe Simpson led four Lights in double figures with 12 points. Shaun Tatarka, LaVon Myers and David Maddock each added 10 points, while freshman Corbin Pearson gave Northern solid bench play with six points. Devin Jackson chipped in with eight.

“We definitely looked like a team that was coming off a tough loss (overtime defeat at Saskatchewan),” Northern head coach Shawn Huse said. “I was very pleased with how we came out of the gates strong and did what was needed to hang on for the win. We hit some big free throws and got some key stops when we needed them, not to mention some key minutes from almost everyone on our bench. Corbin did a very good job on both ends of the floor, in some key moments.”

Northern found itself in a similar situation against Warner-Pacific on Saturday night. The Lights led 36-30 at the break, but the game was nip-and-tuck through the entire second half. Still, a veteran MSU-N squad found a way at the end.

Tatarka made five three's on his way to 15 points, while Myers had 13 points and three trey's. Simpson chipped in with eight points and nine rebounds against W-P, a team that is predicted to be very good this year in NAIA DII.

“We did a great job of defending for forty minutes. Our shots weren't necessarily falling against their unusual defense but once again we came up with key stops and a couple of big free throws to close it out,” Huse said. “LaVon and Joe and David, and all five on one possession came up with some key steals on, I believe, four of their last five possessions of the game - that was the difference for us in the end.”

The Lights (4-1) have another tough road trip upcoming. MSU-N will play three games in three nights in Oregon this coming weekend, including a rematch with Warner-Pacific Saturday night in Portland.

Lights 74, Dickinson State 68

MSU-N — Sean Kelly 2-3 0-0 4, Joe Simpson 3-6 6-8 12, Devin Jackson 3-8 2-3 8, Shaun Tatarka 4-8 0-1 10, LaVon Myers 3-9 3-3 10, David Maddock 3-6 2-2 10, Jordan Harris 2-2 0-0 4, Mike LaValley 2-5 0-0 5, Chris Brown 2-2 1-2 5, Ben Mitchell 0-1 0-0 0, Corbin Pearson 3-4 0-0 6. Totals: 27-54 14-19 74.

Halftime: Northern 38-24; 3-point field goals: 6-23 (Tatarka 2-6, Myers 1-5, Maddock 2-4, LaValley 1-4); Rebounds: 29 (Maddock 6); Fouls 26. Fouled out: None.
Lights 61, Warner Pacific 60

MSU-N – Jordan Harris 2-4 0-0 4, Sean Kelly 1-2 2-3 4, Joe Simpson 4-9 0-0 8, David Maddock 2-6 1-2 7, Devin Jackson 0-4 1-2 1, Shaun Tatarka 5-13 0-1 15; LaVon Myers 3-9 4-5 13, Mike LaValley 0-2 0-0 0, Chris Brown 1-1 0-0 2, Ben Mitchell 1-4 2-4 4, Corbin Pearson 1-1 0-0 2. Totals: 20-55 11-18 61.

Halftime: Northern 36-30; 3-point field goals: 10-32 (Maddock 2-6, Tatarka 5-12, Myers 3-9); Rebounds: 33 (Simpson 9); Fouls: 20. Fouled out: None.