

Northern men make a long trek to California

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Road games have been the story of the Montana State University-Northern men's basketball team's early part of the 2011 season. And not just road games, but tough ones too.

And the No. 15 Lights have two more of those types of games upcoming when they travel to Vallejo, Calif., for a pair of games against GPAC members Menlo College and California Maritime Academy. The Lights face Menlo tonight at 5:30 p.m. and Maritime Saturday at 7:30 p.m.

Northern is off to an 8-2 start this against a schedule that has become much tougher than many anticipated back in August. Northern has played a series of quality opponents on the road the last three weeks, including earning a hard-fought win over Cascade Conference powerhouse Southern Oregon last Saturday in Lewiston, Idaho.

As a team, the Lights are playing their trademark defense and that's carried them for this tough road stretch. Northern started slow shooting from the outside, but did come on strong in two wins in Idaho last weekend. David Maddock and Devin Jackson both had big games on the road, as did Sean Kelly, while LaVon Myers and Shaun Tatarka also had moments of good shooting in both Northern's wins. Former Big Sandy standout Corbin Pearson also gave the Lights good minutes off the bench last weekend as well.

But as several Lights get to have a homecoming of sorts this weekend, with Kelly, Myers, Jordan Harris, Chris Brown and Joe Simpson are all from California, Northern head coach Shawn Huse said his team will be tested yet again on the road.

"This has been a grind these last three weeks," Huse said. "Long trips, playing games on our opponents home floor in front of really good crowds, it's been a tough stretch, but great experience for our kids. I've been really proud of the way this team has battled through all that and to come away with some of the wins we've gotten on the road, it's been big for us.

"But we'll have our hands full on the road again this weekend," he added. "California Maritime is a really good club with some very good players, and Menlo has some really strong guys as well. And both teams have already faced a lot of quality opponents this season."

Menlo is off to a 0-4 start to the season, but included in those are losses to NAIA Top 25 power Fresno Pacific, NCAA DII stalwart Humboldt State and Big Sky Conference contender Sacramento State. So there's no doubt the Marauders are battle tested.

Meanwhile, the host Keelhaulers will be ready for the Lights on Saturday night on their home floor. Northern is playing in the Keelhauler Classic and the Keelhaulers are 3-1 on the young season. California Maritime's lone loss came to GSAC power Point Loma, and the Keelhaulers are picked as one of the favorites in their conference this season.

So for one more weekend, the Lights will certainly have their work cut out for them a long way from home.



Montana State University-Northern's Will Andrews (right) celebrates scoring a touchdown off a fumble recovery during last Saturday's Frontier Conference football game between the Lights and Carroll College at Blue Pony Stadium in Havre. Andrews led the Frontier in sacks this season.

After this weekend's trip to California, the Lights will be at home for the remainder of the year. Northern's next home game is set for Dec. 3 when the Lights host the University of Alberta-Augustana.