

MSU-N Notebook: Lights keep shining on their home court

MSU-Northern Basketball Notebook

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Winning at home in the Frontier Conference is about as big as anything else during the course of the season. Especially, this year because so many teams in both men's and women's basketball are so good, it will make life on the road very tough.

And that's why this weekend's four games at the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse could have lasting implications for the MSU-Northern basketball teams, on opposite ends of the spectrum.

The 13th ranked Northern men held home court over the weekend, beating Montana Tech on Friday night and 23rd ranked UM-Western on Saturday. The two wins gave Northern a perfect 3-0 start to Frontier season, with all three wins coming in Have.

Make no mistake, Northern has also been a good road team under head coach Shawn Huse, but the two wins this weekend were big because the Lights will only play two of their final five regular season games in Havre. Northern only plays two home games in February, so winning on the Armory Gymnasium floor, something MSU-N has done 16 straight times in Frontier games now, is key.

"You always want to win at home," Northern junior Devin Jackson said after the Lights took down the Bulldogs Saturday night. "We know we're going to take every team's best shot this season, and we took two of them this weekend. So it was real big for us to win these two games at home."

The Lights will try to pad their early Frontier Conference lead when they travel to Carroll College and Rocky Mountain College this weekend. Northern will be back at home Jan. 27-28 to host Westminster College and Lewis-Clark State, respectively.

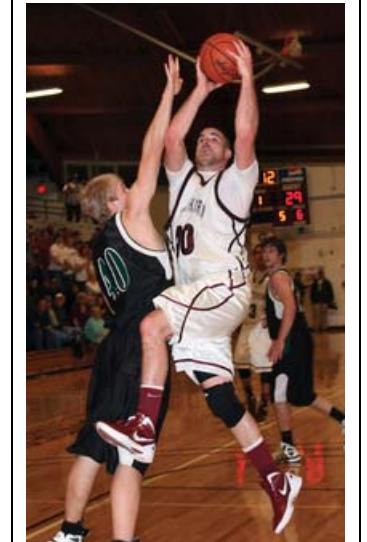
Conversely, the Skylights went a heartbreaking 0-2 at home this weekend. Before falling to Montana Tech and UM-Western on back-to-back nights in Havre, MSU-N hadn't lost a home game all season.

And the Skylights have the same February schedule as the Lights do, so with only home games against Westminster and Lewis-Clark State left in January and games against Carroll College and Rocky Mountain College in February, a lot of Northern's success the rest of the way will depend on how the Skylights play on the road.

"It's tough right now," Northern head coach Chris Mouat said. "We just have to pick up the pieces and find ways to go and win games on the road. We have to do that and we've been a pretty good road team this season."



MSU-Northern's Laci Keller (left) lays up a shot during Friday night's heartbreaking loss to Montana Tech in Havre.



MSU-Northern's Ben Mitchell goes up for a shot during Friday night's men's basketball game at the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse. The Lights haven't lost a conference game at home in two-plus seasons.

Did they get it wrong?

While the foul called on Laci Keller at the end of Friday night's women's game between MSU-N and Tech was controversial in itself, that's a judgement call by the official, as all fouls are.

But what really struck many as odd is that the foul seemed to be of the dead ball variety, which means free throws should not have been awarded to Tech's Danielle Devenny. A quick Google check on official NCAA basketball rules showed teams who are the beneficiary of a dead-ball foul shall be awarded the ball out of bounds, and I could find nothing in the rule books to differentiate between bonus and non-bonus situations. Meaning that despite Tech being in the bonus with :10 to go, Devenny should not have been awarded the two foul shots – instead, Tech should have head the ball to inbound on its sideline.

The only thing I can figure is, the referees determined that the ball had already started to be thrown in bounds by Northern before the foul on Keller was called. But I was able to review the play many times on the archived broadcast of the game, and it didn't appear that was the case.

In any event, it was a bizarre situation because a review of the broadcast also showed that Devenny and Keller had become tangled while both running down the floor, nearly 50 feet away from the in bounds play.

There has been no official word from the Frontier Conference on whether or not Friday night's officiating crew was suspended for one game. The Frontier head of officials was present in Havre for Friday night's men's and women's games between Northern and Montana Tech and he met with referees as is standard procedure every time he evaluates games in person. Two of the three officials in Friday night's women's game were Frontier officials from Salt Lake City.

Lights and Dawgs

The men's basketball rivalry between Northern and Carroll College is widely regarded as one of the most heated in the Frontier. But has any two teams played better games against each other than Northern and Western as of late?

Northern is 7-3 against Western in the last 10 meetings, but almost all of those games have been decided by seven points or less. The two teams have met in each of the last two postseasons, and have three four NAIA national tournament appearances between them over the last three seasons.

Saturday night's 63-55 Lights' win was another great one in the series. The Bulldogs had the ball and were only down four points with under two minutes to go, and the fact that the game went down to the wire is typical of what has become one of the Frontier's best matchups. Throw in the fact that both teams are now perennially ranked and you get what has become an epic series.

The Lights and Bulldogs will go at it again on Feb. 10 in Dillon.

Defending the bigs

It was a tough weekend all the way around for the MSU-Northern women's basketball team, and a big reason why was Tech and Western's post players.

On Friday night, the 6-0 Devenny and 6-2 Kelsey DeWit combined for 34 points and eight rounds against MSU-N, while Western's 6-3 Hayley Pettit poured in 21 points, grabbed 10 boards and had two blocks against the smaller Skylights.

But despite being outsized, MSU-N's posts showed heart. Kelly Millager and Keller worked hard both nights to keep their bigger opponents at bay, with Millager matching Pettit in the rebound column on Saturday night. Jordan Bruursema also continues to play much bigger than she's listed, and as a result of their hard work, the Skylights outrebounded Tech by six and only lost the battle to Western by four. That's a job well done by MSU-N.