

## Home Court: Lights sweep Tech, Western

Victory over Bulldogs gives MSU-N's Huse career win No. 200

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When you're ranked as high as the Montana State University-Northern men's basketball team is, you're going to get everyone's best shot. Games will be tough, even at home.

And that's exactly what unfolded this past weekend at the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse as the No. 13 Lights swept Frontier rivals Montana Tech and UM-Western to remain undefeated in conference play.

Saturday night's game, against the No. 23 UM-Western Bulldogs was a huge Frontier clash between two of the most successful programs in the league in recent years. It was also a nationally-ranked rivalry game with the Bulldogs coming in ranked No. 23 in the NAIA.

And the game lived up to the standards the two teams have set over the last couple of years as Northern held off the Bulldogs 63-55. The win also marked the 200th victory in Northern head coach Shawn Huse's illustrious career in Havre.

"It really came down to us making big shots and getting big stops," Huse said after the Lights beat the Bulldogs for the seventh time in the last 10 meetings. "These were two really good teams going at each other tonight, and I thought we just had some guys step up and make some clutch shots and as a team, we got some key defensive stops. That was the difference."

Defense was crucial. The Lights are the second-ranked scoring defense in all of NAIA basketball, while the Bulldogs are the highest scoring team in the Frontier. And defense won out. Northern held Western 23 points below its season average, in spite of a sparkling 28-point performance by senior Brandon Brown, who tried to carry Western down the stretch before fouling out.

"Brandon Brown is a great player, he did some great things tonight," Huse said. "But I thought David Maddock's defense on him was huge. If David doesn't defend him as well as he did, he probably would have gotten 38 points tonight and I don't know if we could overcome that. So I was really proud of David for that. I was really proud of the way our entire team defended, because Western is very capable on offense."

The Lights also had timely offense, especially from the 3-point-line.

With 5:31 to play, Northern was clinging to a 49-48 lead, but Shaun Tatarka nailed his second triple of the half, even though he was playing with four fouls, and Devin Jackson buried a long-range three right after to push the lead to 55-48. Seconds later, a technical foul on the Western bench allowed Northern to extend the lead to 57-48.



Northern's Joe Simpson flies to the rim during Saturday night's nationally-ranked showdown between the Lights and UM-Western in Havre.



Montana State University-Northern's Sean Kelly (white) slams home a ball during the second half of Saturday night's Frontier Conference showdown between the No. 13 Lights and No. 23 UM-Western Bulldogs. The Lights won 63-55.

But Western didn't fold. After a quick five points, the Lights found themselves again only up four points. But in the final two minutes, LaVon Myers and Joe Simpson went a combined 6-for-6 from the foul line to salt the game away and keep the Lights unbeaten on their home floor this season.

"It was a tough night for Tark (Tatarka) at times with foul trouble, but he stepped up and hit some big shots in the second half," Huse said. "Devin had a great game and hit some huge shots tonight. Joe Simpson made clutch free throws, LaVon made big free throws, Sean Kelly had some big plays, David Maddock had some big plays, Ben Mitchell made a big three tonight. I just thought we had a lot of guys step up and make big shots and that was the difference."

Kelly sparked the Lights early on with a three after Northern fell behind 10-2 to start the game. He also had a high-flying dunk early in the second half which ignited a large Northern crowd. Simpson had a highlight reel dunk in the first half which brought Northern back to a 12-12 tie, while a Maddock trey capped off a 9-0 run which gave the Lights their first lead.

Jackson would heat up late in the half, scoring back-to-back three's which helped MSU-N to a slim 30-27 halftime edge. Jackson and Maddock each hit big shots early in the second half to help Northern keep the slim margin, while down the stretch, Simpson had a steal and subsequent dunk at the 11:07 mark, which not only sent the crowd into another frenzy, but also helped Northern hold an eight-point lead halfway through the second half.

Western never went away however, but the Lights had enough firepower to hold the Bulldogs at bay in the final, frantic minutes of the game.

"Against a good team like Western, it comes down to execution," Jackson said. "I thought we played a really smart game, especially on defense. The whole team executed the game-plan really well tonight."

Jackson paced a balanced Northern attack with 13 points and four assists. The junior from Denver went 5-for-8 from the floor and 3-for-5 from beyond the arc. He also had a strong night defensively and some timely shots. Simpson finished with 12 points and seven rebounds while doing a great job defending Western's bigger interior players. Myers added 11 points and Tatarka scored nine, all on three's, despite sitting large minutes with foul trouble.

"I think it just comes down to the confidence we have in each other," Jackson said. "Everybody on this team is confident in each other and we know we can all step up and make shots."

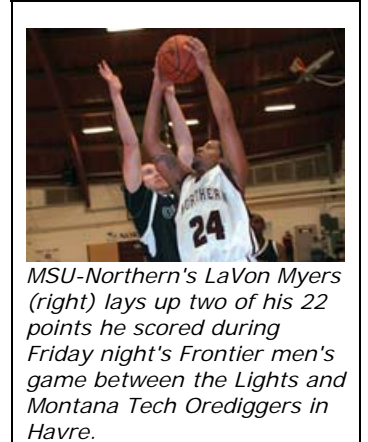
"Guys get open and make good passes and we find each other out there," he added. "We did a good job of doing that tonight."

Brown got 28 points, six above his league-leading average, but he was the only Bulldog to reach double figures. Western shot 48 percent from the floor but struggled from three, going just 3-of-11 as Northern's defense once again clamped down.

The loss was the first in conference play for the Bulldogs (13-5, 2-1). Northern and Western will meet again on Feb. 11 in Dillon.

Meanwhile, the Lights finished off a perfect two-week home stand to open Frontier play. And the Lights finished it off with perhaps their biggest win so far this season.

"I'm just really proud of the effort," Huse said. "In this league, against a team like Western, you can't let down, even for a second and I just felt like our guys were very determined, very focused and very intense for 40 minutes tonight. I'm really proud of them."



*MSU-Northern's LaVon Myers (right) lays up two of his 22 points he scored during Friday night's Frontier men's game between the Lights and Montana Tech Orediggers in Havre.*

## Lights dig up Tech

It wasn't easy, it wasn't pretty at times, but the MSU-Northern men's basketball team took care of business Friday night at the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse in Havre.

Against a much-improved Montana Tech squad, the Lights used a strong second-half push to beat the Orediggers 62-52 in what would be a weekend sweep for MSU-N.

The Lights got a spark from Sean Kelly, who broke a 32-32 halftime tie by scoring six straight points to open the second half. Northern also got a big lift from senior guard LaVon Myers, who scored a season-high 22 points, including a 4-for-8 performance from the 3-point-line. Myers' night offset an impressive defensive performance by the Orediggers, who limited MSU-N to seven three's on the night.

"I thought we played good, but there are plenty of things we could have done better," Myers said. "I think this win starts with our team defense. I thought we played really well defensively. For me, I got to my spots and my teammates found me. Luckily, the shots were going down for me tonight."

Myers scored 17 of his 22 points in the first half, including a stretch where he scored 10-of-12 Northern points. He hit back-to-back three's at the 15:15 mark of the first half, and was hot throughout the first 20 minutes. Myers' last bucket of the half put the Lights up three, but a Tyree Haynie triple, which came on the heels of a long-range bomb from A.J. Paine left the game tied at 30-30 at intermission.

"I'm proud of our guys for gutting this one out," Northern head coach Shawn Huse said. "It wasn't pretty, and it was by no means easy. Tech showed they are very capable of beating anybody in our league.

"And we knew coming in we were going to take everyone's best punch and we took one from Tech tonight," he added. "So I'm proud of our kids for fighting and scrapping and finding a way to win a tough game."

And Tech forced the Lights to scrap right to the end.

But Kelly's burst out of the locker room and another 5-point swing from Myers, as well as big 3-pointers by Devin Jackson and Shaun Tatarka were enough to give the Lights a nine-point cushion with 11 minutes to play. From there, the Orediggers could never quite get over the hump. Tech cut the lead to six points on two difference occasions, but the Lights played good, patient defense and made free throws to put the game away.

"I thought we stuck to the game plan pretty well," Myers said. "There are a lot of things we could have done better, but I thought we were patient and executed the plan pretty well."

Myers was the catalyst, while Kelly finished with an impressive 13 points and five rebounds. Jackson added nine points and six boards, while Joe Simpson chipped in with six and six. As a team, the Lights limited Tech to just 37 percent shooting and only three trey's.

"I was really proud of LaVon tonight," Huse said. "As a floor general, I ask a lot of him, I ask him to carry that load and he really did that for us tonight. We needed big shots from him and he delivered.

"I thought Sean Kelly stepped up big tonight too," he continued. "He had a really nice game and made big plays when we really needed them. I always say that one player does not a team make, and tonight showed that we have a great group of unselfish guys, and we had different guys step up and make big plays at different times. I think that's our strength, we never have to rely on just one guy every night. We have so many different guys who are capable of helping us win games and we showed that tonight."

Haynie led three Orediggers (10-6, 2-2) in double figures with 15 points.

The win over Tech, coupled with Saturday night's win over Western moved Northern to 3-0 in the Frontier and 17-2 overall. The Lights are alone atop the Frontier standings as they go on the road for the first

time. Northern will face Carroll College Thursday night in Helena and Rocky Mountain College Saturday in Billings.

"These were big for us," Jackson said. "You have to win games at home, so it was big for us to beat both these teams."

**Lights Notes:** Huse now has a career mark of 200-107 in nine-plus seasons with the Lights. The average margin of victory in Northern-Western games the last two seasons (four games) is just five points either way. In three years as a Bulldog, Brown has averaged 24 points per game in Havre. Despite being outsized in both games this weekend, the Lights won the battle of the boards by three combined against Tech and Western. There were five high-flying dunks Saturday night, two by Simpson and one from Kelly, as well as two from Western's Kyle Erickson. Northern is off to its best-ever record under Huse at this point in a season.

**Lights are 3-0 in Frontier, 17-2 overall; Next up: at Carroll on Thursday, at Rocky on Saturday**

**Lights 62, Montana Tech 52**

**MT** — Tanner Neumann 0-2 0-0 0, Brandon Rydberg 0-0 0-0 0, Daniel Simon 2-8 1-4 5, AJ Paine 4-7 3-4 13, Reid Baerlocher 0-0 0-0 0, Brian Cummings 2-9 1-2 5, Tyree Haynie 6-10 2-2 15, Cole Conway 2-5 0-0 4, Adam Greeger 3-10 4-4 10. Totals 19-51 11-16 52.

**MSU-N** — David Maddock 1-4 1-2 3, Devin Jackson 3-9 1-3 9, Jordan Harris 1-2 0-0 2, Shaun Tatarka 1-7 2-2 5, LaVon Myers 8-12 2-3 22, Sean Kelly 6-6 1-1 13, Mike LaValley 0-0 0-0 0, Chris Brown 0-1 0-0 0, Joe Simpson 3-8 0-1 6, Ben Mitchell 0-2 2-2 2, Baird Henning 0-0 0-0 0, Corbin Pearson 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 23-51 9-14 62.

Halftime: 32-32. 3-pt FG: MT 3-13 (Neumann 0-1, Simon 0-1, Paine 2-5, Cummings 0-1, Haynie 1-3, Conway 0-1, Greeger 0-1), MSU-N 7-21 (Maddock 0-2, Jackson 2-5, Tatarka 1-5, Myers 4-8, Mitchell 0-1). Rebounds: MT 32 (Greeger 9), MSU-N 34 (Jackson 6, Simpson 6). Fouls MT16, MSU-N 16. Fouled out: Conway . Technical: none.

**Lights 63, UM-Western 55**

**UM-W** — Kyle Erickson 4-5 0-2 8, Bridger Chambers 4-5 0-0 8, Tyler Hurley 2-5 1-2 7, Kyle Perry 1-2 0-0 2, Gabe Rucker 0-2 0-0 0, Brandon Brown 10-24 7-8 28, Jordan Overstreet 0-0 0-0 0, Tyler Miller 1-3 0-0 2, Vince Turk 0-0 0-0 0, Cedric Clarington 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 22-46 8-12 55.

**MSU-N** — David Maddock 2-5 0-0 6, Devin Jackson 5-8 0-0 13, Jordan Harris 1-1 0-0 2, Shaun Tatarka 3-9 0-0 9, LaVon Myers 0-6 11-11 11, Sean Kelly 2-4 0-0 5, Mike LaValley 0-1 0-0 0, Chris Brown 0-0 0-2 0, Joe Simpson 5-9 2-2 12, Ben Mitchell 2-2 0-0 5, Baird Henning 0-0 0-0 0, Corbin Pearson 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 20-45 13-15 63.

Halftime: Northern 30-27. 3-pt FG: UM-W 3-11 (Chambers 0-1, Hurley 2-4, Rucker 0-2, Brown 1-4), MSU-N 10-27 (Maddock 2-5, Jackson 3-5, Tatarka 3-7, Myers 0-6, Kelly 1-2, LaValley 0-1, Mitchell 1-1). Rebounds: UM-W 25 (TEAM 5, Erickson 5, Brown 5), MSU-N 27 (Simpson 7). Fouls UM-W 16, MSU-N15. Fouled out: Brown . Technical: Montana Western Bench.