

## Fighting Saints shock Lights in overtime

*George Ferguson*

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If the Carroll College Saints were out for revenge for their loss to the Montana State University-Northern men's basketball team in last year's Frontier Conference championship game, they certainly got it.

Carroll's Ben Cutler made a running jumper with two seconds left in overtime to lift the Saints to a 53-51 win over the No. 12 Lights Thursday night at the Carroll P.E. Center in Helena. The loss was Northern's first in Frontier Conference play, and Cutler's game-winner snapped MSU-N's 12-game winning streak.

Losing to the Saints, one of Northern's biggest rivals always stings, but this one had a particular bite to it for the Lights.

Northern seemed to have control of the game in the final few minutes, leading by seven points with 1:30 to play. But Carroll's Tony Dalton made a huge 3-pointer to pull the Saints within one point with 16 seconds left in regulation, then Carroll fouled Northern's LaVon Myers on the ensuing possession and Myers missed the front end of a one-and-one situation. The Saints got the rebound, went down the floor and while Andy Garland's game-winning attempt rimmed out, Dalton was right there for the putback, putting the saints ahead 43-42 with four seconds remaining.

But Northern had one last gasp and the Lights executed a perfect in-bounds play, which saw the ball end up in Joe Simpson's hands. Simpson sprinted down the floor and went in for a game-winning layup. He missed, but was fouled on the play, leaving him at the foul line with a chance to win the game. However, free throws turned out to be costly again. Simpson missed the first shot, but did make the second pressure free throw, which sent the game into overtime.

"It's pretty tough that we let that one get away in regulation," Northern head coach Shawn Huse said. "We had chances on both ends of the floor to put the game away and we didn't do it. We were up by a comfortable margin, and when you have a chance to put a team like Carroll away on their home floor, you have to do it.

"But we missed critical free throws on our end, and we had defensive breakdowns on the other end," he added. "We gave up two wide-open three's and we gave up an offensive rebound that let them go ahead. Those things are things we should not let happen. We're a veteran team and we expect to execute in those situations."

Carroll quickly took the lead away from the Lights and went ahead by three points with under a minute to go in the extra frame. But Northern seemed to come up big again as Devin Jackson buried a 3-pointer from the right corner to tie the game at 51-51 with nine seconds left. However, out of a time out, Carroll ran a play for Cutler and he executed it to perfection, going high off the glass for what turned out to be the game-winner. Northern had a desperation heave at the buzzer, but it missed and the Lights walked out of Helena with their first conference blemish.

"No disrespect intended towards Carroll," Huse said. "But we feel like we gave that one away. They made plays down the stretch and Tony Dalton came up huge for them. But we had chances to close them out on both ends of the floor and we didn't get it done. That just can't happen. We have to better than that at finishing games and I think our guys know that."

Huse pointed to defensive breakdowns late in the game, but Northern's lack of consistency on offense really allowed the Saints to hang around. The Lights came in allowing 56 points per game, tops in the NAIA and they bettered that stat by one on Thursday.

However, on the offensive end, Northern was way off the mark for much of the night. MSU-N attempted a season-high 43 3-pointers and made just nine of them. The Lights were stone cold at the start of a game which was tied at 12-12 with just four minutes left in the first half. Jackson made a couple of shots to push the Lights to a 22-16 halftime advantage, but it didn't take long for Carroll to erase that deficit in the second stanza. However, a big three by Shaun Tatarka with under two minutes to go propelled Northern to a seven-point lead and a chance at a huge road win.

"Sometimes, your offense has to be your best defense," Huse said. "Carroll sat in a zone and let us have the three all night. And we just didn't make them. We certainly know we have to shoot better than that in order to be successful. Really, that's what it came down to, yes, we played pretty good defense and our effort was there, but at some point, we have to make shots and we have to make free throws. At the end of the game, Carroll did that and we didn't."

Jackson paced Northern with 17 points and Tatarka added 15. Joe Simpson scored nine points and he and David Maddock each pulled down seven rebounds. As a team, the Lights shot just 37 percent from the floor and got out-rebounded 35-34.

Carroll (2-2, 9-7) got 17 points from Dalton, including a 6-for-6 free-throw performance in the final two minutes of regulation and overtime. Andy Garland added 14 points and nine boards.

The loss in Helena was Northern's first in conference play. The Lights are 3-1 in the league and tied with UM-Western atop the conference standings. MSU-N fell to 17-3 overall.

"It's tough to swallow this one right now," Huse said. "Because we were in a position to win this game, to put a very good Carroll team away. But, we're just going to have to regroup, to put this one in the past and move on to getting ready for Rocky. Rocky is another really good Frontier team and it's going to be a big challenge to try and go in and win on their home floor."

Saturday's game between RMC and Northern will tip off at 7:30 p.m. in Billings and can be heard locally on 92.5 KPQX FM. It can also be streamed live at [www.msun.edu/athletics](http://www.msun.edu/athletics). Northern is home to face Westminster and Lewis-Clark State next Friday and Saturday.

### **Carroll 53, Lights 51 (OT)**

**MSU-N** — Sean Kelly 1-1 0-0 2, Joe Simpson 4-7 1-2 9, Devin Jackson 6-13 1-1 17, Shaun Tatarka 5-17 2-2 15, LaVon Myers 2-10 0-1 6, David Maddock 1-9 0-0 2, Jordan Harris 0-0 0-0 0, Mike LaValley 0-2 0-0 0, Chris Brown 0-2 0-0 0, Ben Mitchell 0-0 0-0 0, Corbin Pearson 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 19-61 4-6 51.

**CC** — Tony Dalton 5-10 6-6 17, Andy Garland 7-16 0-0 14, Renan Custodio 1-1 0-0 2, Chris McGrath 2-5 2-2 6, Ben Cutler 3-14 0-0 7, Dan Pearson 3-5 0-0 7, Dee Crandall 0-2 0-0 0, Chase Godecke 0-0 0-0 0, James MacIntyre 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 21-53 8-8 53.

Halftime - Northern 22-16. 3-pointers - Northern, 9-43 (Jackson 4-11, Tatarka 3-15, Myers 2-9, Maddock 0-6, LaValley 0-2); CC, 3-12 (Dalton 1-3, Garland 0-1, McGrath 0-2, Cutler 1-3, Pearson 1-2, Crandall 0-1). Rebounds - Northern 34 (Simpson 7, Maddock 7); CC 35 (Garland 9). Assists - Northern 5 (Myers 2), CC 4 (Cutler 2). Blocks - Northern 3 (Simpson 2), CC 1 (Dalton). Steals - Northern 6 (Jackson 2), CC 3 (Cutler 2). Turnovers - Northern 7, CC 10. Fouls - Northern 14, CC 11. Fouled out - none. Technicals - none.