

Lights trounce Battlin' Bears

MSU-Northern men rebound in a big way in Billings

George Ferguson

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The Montana State University-Northern men's basketball team is a veteran bunch. The Lights have seven seniors and a host of players with a wealth of experience.

That veteran presence was on display Saturday night in Billings as the No. 12 Lights rebounded from a bitter loss at Carroll College on Thursday night by thrashing the Rocky Mountain College Battlin' Bears 73-45 inside the Fortin Center.

The victory was a complete one, as the Lights dominated the final five minutes of the first half, as well as the entire second half.

"Following the loss at Carroll, we responded like you hope a mature team would," Northern head coach Shawn Huse said. "We brought the fight and concentration for a full 40 minutes against a very good Rocky team and I'm proud of our guys for doing that. I feel like, the way we played, we would have beaten most teams on Saturday night. It was a pretty complete effort by our guys."

Northern attempted 40-plus 3-pointers in its overtime loss at Carroll Thursday night and it seemed like few of them went in. On Saturday night, the Bears must have felt like every shot Northern attempted from the beyond the arc was going to fall.

The Lights blew the game wide open on a 17-0 run early in the second half, as LaVon Myers made three three's and Devin Jackson hit a pair of long-range bombs during the run. From there, the Bears never had a chance as the Lights stayed red-hot from the field, shooting 59 percent from the field in the second half, while the Bears were limited to just 29 percent in the final stanza. Northern's largest lead was 34 points when it lead 69-34 with five minutes left in the contest.

And while the Lights were draining 14 triples on the night, Huse pointed to the play of forwards like Joe Simpson, Sean Kelly, Ben Mitchell, Chris Brown and Corbin Pearson for their excellent presence in the post.

"I think we were much better going inside out," Huse said. "We got a lot of good looks because our guys were working so hard in the post and making great passes back out to our shooters. That really got us going. I was really proud of the way we rebounded too. We won on the boards against a big front line, and I thought our guards did a great job of helping out on the boards. That was a big key for us."

"So this was one of those complete games for us," he added. "Everybody who played had a big hand in our success."

Rocky hung tough for much of the first half, but Shaun Tatarka drilled back-to-back three's late in the first 20 minutes and MSU-N went into the locker room with a 31-21 edge. From there, Northern was lights out as it picked apart the Rocky defense and swarmed the Bears' offense on the other end.

Myers had a huge game, making five three's en route to a game-high 19 points. He was 7-for-10 from the floor. Tatarka also had a big night, scoring 15 points, all on three's. He grabbed a team-high six rebounds and added three two steals. Jackson chipped in with 11 points, three assists and two steals, while Simpson, Brown and Kelly added six points each.

Rocky (2-3, 9-11) was led by Matt Fogarty with 11 points. He was the only Bear to reach double figures. Sergio Trocha added eight points and 11 rebounds. The Lights forced the Bears into nine second-half turnovers, held them to just 34 percent shooting for the night and only two three's. Northern also bettered its NAIA average of allowing 56 points per game by 11 points. With the loss, RMC dropped into a six-way tie in the Frontier standings.

Meanwhile, the Lights (4-1, 18-3) not only bounced back from their loss at Carroll, but they remained in first in the Frontier standings heading into this weekend's home showdown with Lewis-Clark State on Friday night at Westminster College on Saturday.

"I'm just really proud of our guys," Huse said. "You don't quite know how you're going to respond to a loss like the one we suffered at Carroll. That was a tough loss. But our guys left no doubt about how they would respond. They were angry and disappointed and they came out and played a great and complete game against Rocky."

Lights are 4-1 in Frontier, 18-3 overall; Next up: vs LC State on Friday, vs Westminster on Saturday

Lights 73, Rocky 45

MSU-N — Joe Simpson 3-5 0-0 6, Ben Mitchell 1-4 0-0 2, Devin Jackson 4-7 0-0 11, Shaun Tatarka 5-10 0-0 15, LaVon Myers 7-10 0-0 19, David Maddock 1-4 0-0 3, Jordan Harris 0-2 0-0 0, Sean Kelly 3-5 0-1 6, Mike LaValley 0-1 0-0 0, Chris Brown 3-4 0-0 6, Pat Jensen 1-3 0-0 2, Baird Henning 1-5 0-0 2, Corbin Pearson 0-0 1-2 1. Totals: 29-60, 1-3, 73. 3-point goals: 14-27 (Mitchell 0-1, Jackson 3-4, Tatarka 5-9, Myers 5-8, Maddock 1-3, LaValley 0-1, Henning 0-1). Rebounds: 39 (Tatarka 6). Assists: 16 (Simpson 3, Jackson 3, Maddock 3). Steals: 6 (Jackson 2, Tatarka 2). Blocks: 0. Fouls: 14. Turnovers: 10.

RMC — John Bayo 2-7 1-2 5, Joel Barndt 1-4 0-0 2, Sergio Trocha 3-5 2-4 8, Doundrekyc Parham 1-7 0-0 2, Darryl Alexander 0-2, 0-0 0, Anthony Carter 1-1 0-0 2, Nick Longmire 1-4 0-0 2, Derek Bartel 1-3 1-1 3, Kurtis Parsons 1-3 0-0 3, Nile Finney 2-8 0-0 5, Matt Fogarty 5-9 1-1 11, Danny Little 1-1 0-0 2. Totals: 19-54, 5-8, 45. 3-point goals: 2-11 (Bayo 0-1, Parham 0-2, Longmire 0-1, Parsons 1-3, Finney 1-4). Rebounds: 31 (Trocha 11). Assists: 6 (Trocha 2, Parham 2). Steals: 4 (Four with one). Blocks: 5 (Bayo 2, Little 2). Fouls: 8. Turnovers: 13.

Halftime: Northern 31, RMC 21.