GREAT FALLS — In game which is sure to be an instant classic, it looked like the Montana State University-Northern men’s basketball team finally had everything under control as time ticked down against the up-start University of Great Falls Argos.

But it only looked that way.

A couple of missed free throws kept the door slightly ajar for the Argos and UGF’s Leon Sutton kicked it wide open when he banked in a 28-foot 3-pointer with 1.5 seconds left. The shot ultimately lifted the Argos to a stunning 69-68 upset of the No. 10 Lights Saturday night at the McLaughlin Center in Great Falls.

For nearly 35 minutes, the Lights and Argos waged a back-and-forth battle in front of one of UGF’s biggest crowds in years – a crowd that was largely made up of Northern fans. But an 11-2 run by the Lights, with icy 3-pointers from David Maddock, LaVon Myers and Devin Jackson on three straight trips down the floor helped Northern build a 65-58 lead with 4:09 to play.

But that was only the beginning of what turned out to be a wild finish.

"I thought we did everything we could to control the outcome of the game," Northern head coach Shawn Huse said. "With the exception of not converting on a couple of late trips down the floor and making one or two free throws.

"I don't feel like we lost the game on silly mistakes or by shooting ourselves in the foot," he added. "Missing shots and free throws is going to happen. That's honest. But we didn't give the game away on blatantly bad turnovers or fouls or leaving a shooter wide open or mistakes like that. I thought we played very well and I'm extremely proud of my team.”

Northern felt good about building a seven-point lead with under five minutes to play. It was the largest lead of the night for either team, and it came in a second half which saw 17 lead changes.

But somehow, some way, the Argos just didn’t let go.

After Jackson’s last 3-pointer at the 4:09 mark, the Lights didn’t make another field goal, and that gave UGF time to chip away at the lead. The Argos cut it to 65-60 on two free throws, then got a Melvin Williams layup off a blocked shot by Sutton, which made the score 65-62 with :40 left in the game. MSU-N went up four after Myers made one of two foul shots, but James Holmes made it a two-point game right away when he tipped in a Ken Anderson miss.

From there, the Lights’ Shaun Tatarka, who was playing his last-ever game in his home town of Great Falls, calmly converted two foul shots with :24 left and the Lights were back up by two possession, 68-64. What ensued turned into bedlam.

Marcel Towns, who had a huge night for the Argos tapped in a shot with :11 left to cut the Northern lead back to two points, and Myers missed the front end of a one-and-one on Northern’s ensuing possession. UGF raced down the floor, but Northern’s defense was ready and the only look UGF got was a long, desperation attempt by Sutton. And it went in, sending the UGF crowd and bench into a frenzy. Northern
had time for one last play, but Joe Simpson’s attempt near the foul line bounced off the rim and the Argos had one of their biggest wins in recent history in hand. And only their third win over the Lights in their last 22 meetings.

"We gave ourselves a chance. Northern's a hell of a team," UGF head coach Steve Silsby said. "I'm just real proud of my guys.

"Just really proud of our guys," Huse commented. "UGF is very talented, a really good team and we worked really hard to get the lead and we had what we wanted. We're disappointed in ourselves for not closing it out, but even in that last possession, we kept our poise defensively and we made them shoot the one we wanted them to take – a long 3-pointer way away from the basket, and a contested shot. We got them to shoot what we wanted, and what can you do? It went in.

"So I'm really proud of our guys for the way they played and the way they fought," he continued. "I thought we played really well. We just had a lot of bad breaks down the stretch and we couldn't quite close them out."

The game was very well played from start to finish, as was the first meeting back on Jan. 7, a game Northern won by one point in Havre.

The Argos came out hot Saturday night, quickly taking a 9-4 lead. But back-to-back three’s by Tatarka and Jackson, who were the scoring catalysts for the Lights, quickly gave MSU-N a 10-9 lead. From there, the first half was a battle of attrition. Northern went on a 13-3 run and led by as many as seven points. But UGF stormed back with Sutton capping a UGF 9-0 run on a three from the corner, and the Lights held only a 34-32 lead at intermission.

UGF took the lead on the opening play of second half as Miguel Bocachica nailed a triple, but Tatarka answered with one of his own. Tatarka and Jackson stayed hot, each hitting another three in a furious first 10 minutes of the second stanza, as the lead continued to change hands. And it wasn’t until the Lights led by seven points with four minutes to go that either team seemed to have control of the outcome.

"It was a really fun game to be a part of," Huse said. "Horrible in the way it ended and it's a tough loss for our guys. I feel really bad for our guys because they did everything they could to win the game.

"But it was a fun game in a sense that our fans who made the trip made it a really exciting atmosphere and our guys really fed off that intensity from our crowd. We felt their energy and we appreciate that support greatly," he added.

It was a great atmosphere and the play on the floor was great too.

The Lights shot 48 percent from the floor and made 13-of-32 three’s. The Argos went just 6-of-11 from three but also shot 48 percent from the field. Both teams were stellar defensively, as expected, but neither team turned it over much. UGF had 13 turnovers and the Lights had 14.

Tatarka led Northern with 18 points and five three’s, while Jackson added 17 points, four three’s and three assists. Simpson scored nine points and grabbed a game-high nine rebounds, while Maddock chipped in with eight points off the bench.

UGF, which improved to 4-4 in the Frontier, got a game-high 24 points from Towns. Bocachica and Melvin Williams each scored 10. The Argos out-rebounded Northern 32-26 and the win kept them in the hunt for at the very least, a first-round home game in the playoffs.

Meanwhile, the loss was as heartbreaking as Northern has had all season, but the Lights are still in first place in the Frontier thanks to Lewis-Clark State upsetting UM-Western Saturday night. Northern is 6-2 in league play and 20-4 overall, and the Lights have now lost two games in overtime and two by one point this season.

"It’s tough to think of it like that, but it also means we’re right there every night," Huse said. "We’ve either won or had a chance to win every single game we’ve played this season and that means these guys
are playing hard and competing for 40 minutes every night and they did that again against Great Falls. I feel really bad for our guys for this game, but I know they'll continue to work hard and go forward from here."

There's no rest for the Lights however, as next up is a much-anticipated showdown with Western Friday night in Dillon. After that, MSU-N travels to Butte to take on Montana Tech on Saturday night.

**Lights are 6-2 in the Frontier, 20-4 overall; Up next: at Western Friday, Montana Tech Saturday**

**UGF 69, Lights 68**

**UGF** — James Holmes 1-5 2-2 4, Ken Anderson 1-7 3-4 5, Melvin Williams 5-10 0-0 10, Miguel Bocachica 3-5 1-2 10, Marcel Towns 10-12 3-6 24, Leon Sutton 2-9 2-4 8, David Ubadigbo 1-1 2-2 4, Naren Maynard 2-3 0-0 4. Totals 25-52 13-20.

**MSU-N** — Jordan Harris 2-3 0-0 4, Sean Kelly 2-21-1 5, Joe Simpson 4-8 1-1 9, Shaun Tatarka 5-5 4-4 18, LaVon Myers 2-7 1-3 7, David Maddock 3-9 0-0 8, Devin Jackson 5-13 2-4 17. Totals 23-53 9-13 68.