Lights complete the sweep
George Ferguson
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Basketball is an emotional game. Add a heated rivalry into the mix, then tack on an emotional farewell ceremony to special group of seniors and you have the makings for an intense 40 minutes of basketball.

And that’s exactly what Northern fans got on Saturday night at the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse as the No. 22 Montana State University-Northern Lights put the finishing touches on an emotional weekend of basketball by outlasting Carroll College 79-71. The win gave the Lights a sweep on their final home stand of the regular season – a sweep which included a 77-67 victory over the Rocky Mountain College Battlin’ Bears on Friday night. That win put an end to Northern’s three-game losing streak.

“We have finally healed that wound of losing to Great Falls,” Northern senior Joe Simpson, who was one of eight Lights honored before Saturday night’s game said. “This weekend, we just wanted to come out and have fun, but have fun playing well on our home floor. We wanted to win and make sure these last two games were a great moment for us and we did that.”

Carroll, which beat Northern in overtime last month in Helena, didn’t make having fun east for the Lights.

For Northern, 3-pointers were the story in Helena, albeit missed ones. On Saturday night, the 3-point shot was again the story. It’s what helped Carroll keep it close, and it’s what lifted the Lights to victory as Northern attempted an astounding 45 triples, while making a stellar 18. And Northern had to be good shooting the ball because Carroll zoned the Lights for all 40 minutes Saturday night, just as the Saints did last month in Helena.

“I think people got a glimpse tonight of how they (Saints) have decided to play us,” Northern head coach Shawn Huse said. “That’s what we faced in Helena, and when a team decides to defend you like that, you have to step up and make shots because you are going to get some open looks. Tonight, we stepped up and made some. That was really the biggest difference.

“With their zone, we knew we were going to have to get some inside-out three’s Simpson added. “And our guards hit some big shots tonight. I mean really big shots. All of them did.”

And Simpson didn’t overstate just how many big shots the Lights hit, especially in the second half. And they needed them all to counter four second-half triples by Carroll’s Ben Cutler, as well as a dominant 32-point effort from Saints’ senior Andy Garland.

Northern led 32-30 at halftime, but Cutler came out firing in the second stanza. He hit four treys in the first seven minutes of the second half and the Saints would wrestle the lead away from the Lights on several different occasions.

But in a wild final frame which saw 14 three’s fall between the two teams, Northern had the answers.
Devin Jackson and LaVon Myers combined to make 13 triples on the night, and each of them nailed huge ones down the stretch. After Carroll had gone in front 55-54, Myers drilled a shot from the wing to give the Lights the lead back, then Jackson capped a 10-2 Northern run with a bomb. At that point, the Lights were ahead 64-57 with 8:06 to go. But Carroll wouldn’t go away as Garland scored 14 points in the final seven minutes to keep the Saints alive.

After Jackson’s seventh three gave Northern a nine-point lead with six minutes to go, Carroll chipped away and the Lights found themselves ahead just 72-70 with three minutes left. But, a huge offensive rebound from freshman Corbin Pearson, as well as a layup by Jackson and a Myers’ last deadly three of the night, all combined to help Northern stave off the Saints in the closing minutes – in front of a deafening Northern crowd.

“Carroll came in on here on a mission,” Huse said. They played very well. And it was a great basketball game. But our guys were not going to be denied tonight, especially with what we’ve been through the last three weeks. I think we had a lot of pep in our step tonight, we shot the ball pretty well and our guys really fed off the crowd and the emotion of senior night and having all their families here. I’m just really happy for our guys after a great night like tonight.”

The first half was equally as good as the second too.

Jackson and senior Shaun Tatarka each hit two three’s in the first five minutes to give the Lights an early edge. However, Garland went on an 8-0 run by himself, starting with his only three of the night and it was game on. It took big three’s by David Maddock, Tatarka and Myers down the stretch to give the Lights a slim, 32-30 halftime lead.

Northern shot 40 percent from beyond the arc with Jackson putting in 23 points on 7-of-12 shooting from three. Myers added 20 points, six triples and four assists, while Tatarka made three treys and scored 11 points. Simpson chipped in with eight points and nine boards while defending Garland most of the night. Pearson gave the Lights five rebounds off the bench. The Lights outrebounded the Saints 31-25. Northern was also a perfect 7-for-7 from the foul line on a night when both teams were called for flagrant or intentional fouls.

Carroll (6-6, 13-11) got an 11-for-18 shooting performance from Garland, who had never scored more than 10 points in Havre. He also snatched nine boards, while Cutler, who hit the shot in overtime to beat the Lights in Helena, poured in 22 points.

"It was a great night,” Huse said. "I feel like we really started to get back to Northern basketball this weekend, against two teams who really came in here and played well. Tonight was a big night, especially our seniors, but I’m really proud of this whole team right now.

“This win means a lot,” Simpson added. “We played well, Carroll played really well. It was a great game. I think the support we got from the crowd tonight was big. We fed off their energy. The crowd was really the fuel for our fire tonight.”
Lights battle the Bears

With a three-game losing streak and a gut-wrenching last-second loss to UGF two weeks ago still hovering, the MSU-Northern Lights were certainly glad to be back in the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse on Friday night.

And they took full advantage of the home hospitality, though the Rocky Mountain College Battlin’ Bears didn’t make it easy.

Friday night in Havre, the Lights beat the Bears 77-67, but had to hold Rocky off late in the contest.

“I’m very proud of our team for this win,” Northern head coach Shawn Huse said. “The wound from UGF was still bleeding, and I don’t think it was going to heal until we won. Tonight we got that.

“Rocky made it tough,” he added. “They came in here and played very well. But I’m very proud of our guys for taking it to them early and then doing the things necessary to hang on down the stretch.”

The Lights, who crushed the Bears last month in Billings, did take the fight to Rocky early on.

Devin Jackson scored 14 of Northern’s first 24 points, while LaVon Myers also buried a three. On the other side, Northern’s defense stifled the Bears in the first half, and after a 12-0 run midway though, the Lights had a commanding 24-6 lead. The lead wound up being 11 at the break, 36-25.

“Getting off to a good start was huge,” Myers, who scored 17 points and hit five 3-pointers said. “We came out and took control. We played our style of basketball. Rocky made it a dogfight at the end, and that’s why coming out the way we did was so big.”

The Bears did manage to make a game of it for a time in the second half. Northern had built its lead back to as many as 13 points on a steal and slam dunk by Joe Simpson with 10:26 to go. But in the closing minutes, RMC battled back and had cut the lead all the way down to 69-65 with 2:07 to play.

Northern never wavered however, as the Lights made 9-of-10 free throws in the final minutes to put the game, and the losing streak on ice.

“Credit them (Bears),” Huse said. “They kept fighting back on us. Those two big men they have are two of the best in the NAIA and we had our hands full tonight. Rocky is a very good team despite what their record said.

“I thought free throws were key for us,” he added. “I thought our bench was big. Corbin Pearson and Jordan Harris really gave us a lift. And overall, I thought we did a good job of keeping our composure down the stretch. That’s what a veteran team should do. So I was very proud of that.”

Jackson started what would be a huge weekend for him with 21 points on 8-of-12 shooting against RMC. Myers scored 17 and had six rebounds, while Simpson turned in a monster game against RMC’s taller front line, scoring 17 points and grabbing five boards. Sean Kelly also chipped in with eight points.

RMC (4-8, 11-16) got 20 points from Doundrekyc Parham, and the Bears outrebounded the Lights 39-35.

Meanwhile, the weekend sweep pushed Northern back up to 8-4 in the Frontier Conference and 22-6 overall. The Lights have to finish the regular season with tough games at Westminster and Lewis-Clark State, and the playoff possibilities are still up in the air.

But for the weekend, the Lights were more than happy to just be home, playing well and winning games again.

“We just wanted to come out tonight and have fun, have fun playing with and for each other,” Myers said. “We know when we do that, when we play our style, the winning takes care of itself. I thought our continuity tonight (Friday) was so much better, and one through fifteen, we got contributions. When we do what we do, like we did tonight, the winning takes care of itself. And this was a complete, team win.”
Northern will travel to Westminster on Thursday night and LC State on Saturday to wrap up the regular season.

Lights Notes: MSU-N’s 18 three’s against Carroll was a season high. The Lights made only 9-of-42 trey’s at Carroll last month. The Saints and Lights have now split the regular season series four straight times. Jackson averaged 20 points for the weekend, a career-high for a two-game stretch. Pearson, who’s Big Sandy Pioneers won the 9C boys championship Saturday night, grabbed five boards in each of this weekend’s games.

Lights are 8-4 in the Frontier, 22-6 overall; Up next: at Westminster Thursday, LC State Saturday

Lights 77, Rocky Mountain 67

RMC — Danny Little 0-0 0-0 0, Anthony Carter 0-1 0-0 0, Doundrekc Parham 8-13 2-2 20, Kurtis Parsons 1-3 0-0 3, Nile Finney 1-6 3-3 5, John Bayo 6-11 0-1 12, Darryl Alexander 4-13 0-0 8, Matt Fogarty 3-6 0-1 6, Joel Barndt 2-5 0-2 5, Sergio Trocha 2-3 4-7 8. Totals 27-61 9-16 67.

MSU-N — David Maddock 0-2 0-0 0, Devin Jackson 8-12 3-4 21, Jordan Harris 1-5 0-0 2, Shaun Tatarka 1-6 2-2 5, LaVon Myers 5-12 2-2 17, Sean Kelly 2-3 4-4 8, Mike LaValley 0-2 0-0 0, Chris Brown 1-1 2-3 4, Joe Simpson 6-11 5-7 17, Corbin Pearson 1-1 1-2 3. Totals 25-55 19-24 77.


Lights 79, Carroll 71

CC — Chris McGrath 1-2 0-0 3, Taylor Janoe 0-0 0-0 0, Andy Garland 11-18 9-11 32, Ben Cutler 6-7 6-9 22, Dee Crandall 3-6 0-1 7, James MacIntyre 1-1 1-1 3, Dan Pearson 1-4 0-0 2, Tony Dalton 1-5 0-1 2. Totals 24-43 16-23 71.

MSU-N — David Maddock 2-7 0-0 6, Devin Jackson 8-14 0-0 23, Jordan Harris 1-2 0-0 2, Shaun Tatarka 3-11 2-2 11, LaVon Myers 6-15 2-2 20, Sean Kelly 2-3 0-0 4, Chris Brown 0-0 0-0 0, Joe Simpson 3-6 2-2 8, Ben Mitchell 1-1 0-0 2, Baird Henning 0-0 0-0 0, Corbin Pearson 1-2 1-1 3. Totals 27-61 7-7 79.