Breaking Sports: Lights are Frontier champs, again
No. 21 Northern 61, No. 17 Western 56
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Lights collar Bulldogs for Frontier championship

One year ago, the Montana State University-Northern men's basketball team climbed to the top of the Frontier Conference mountain, winning a league title for the first time in over a decade. Fast forward one year and the Lights are still standing on top of that mountain.

On Monday night, in front of a sold-out crowd at the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse, the No. 21 Lights captured their second straight Frontier crown by fending off the No. 17 UM-Western Bulldogs 61-56. Northern captured back-to-back league titles for the first time since Lights' teams in 1995 and 1996 accomplished the feat.

"It's extra special to do it here at home," Northern head coach Shawn Huse said. "I'm just very proud of these guys. I've always said, this group of guys does things the right way, on and off the court. And it's great to have teams like that, but sometimes, you can have great teams like that and things don't always work out on the court. But this team does things the right way and they've had success and won a lot of games. I just couldn't be more proud of them."

The game was everything it was hyped to be. The Bulldogs threw punch after punch with star senior Brandon Brown scoring a game-high 32 points while playing all 40 minutes. But with the Frontier title hanging in the balance, with just :22 left and the Lights holding a three-point lead, the Northern defense forced Brown into a rare miss from the 3-point-line, and Joe Simpson secured the rebound and the Frontier title to boot.

The two teams waged a great battle with the lead changing hands seven times in the first half, before the Bulldogs closed on an 8-4 run and cut Northern's lead to 31-28. Northern never trailed in the second half, but also never led by more than five points on a night when both squads shot over 50 percent from the floor. Down the stretch however, huge 3-pointers by LaVon Myers and Devin Jackson allowed the Lights to stay in front and ultimately hold off Western in the final seconds.

Simpson led the way for Northern, scoring 18 points and grabbing 11 rebounds. Jackson finished with 14 and Myers totaled 12. Together, the duo hit seven of Northern's eight three's.

The win boosted MSU-N to its 27th win of the season against just six losses and also secured the Frontier's automatic bid to the NAIA national tournament. Western is now 24-9 and should be a lock to make its third straight appearance in Kansas City. The field of 32 for the 2012 men's national tourney will be announced on Wednesday night.

For complete coverage, see Tuesday's Havre Daily News.