Breaking Sports: Cougars come back on Northern, end Lights’ season

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The Montana State University-Northern Lights had some first-half momentum. The Columbia Cougars took it all away in the second half. The Lights couldn't withstand a strong push by Columbia in the second half, while Northern went dry for six minutes in a 58-52 loss in the opening round of the NAIA national tournament Wednesday night in Kansas City. The loss was the second straight for the Lights in the first round, after they captured back-to-back Frontier Conference championships.

After both teams struggled to get in sync offensively early on, Northern ripped off a 9-0 run on 3-pointers from Shaun Tatarka and Ben Mitchell. LaVon Myers added a triple of his own as the Lights jumped in front 28-22 at halftime. The Lights clung to that lead for the first five minutes of the second half, but then MSU-N went nearly six minutes without a point. In that same stretch, Columbia started to go inside to senior forward Jordan Dressler, who wound up scoring 22 points and pulling down 11 rebounds. By the time Northern got back on track offensively, the Lights were down four with three minutes to go. The Lights had a chance to tie the game with :31 left, but Joe Simpson's shot in the lane was blocked, and Columbia made six free throws in the final 30 seconds to seal the Lights' fate.

Tatarka led the Lights with 15 points in what was the final game for eight great Northern seniors. Myers added 14 points and Simpson scored 11. Northern finishes its winningest season in school history with a record of 27-7, and as repeat Frontier champions.

For complete coverage of the Lights, and their game with the Cougars (27-6), who will play either Oklahoma Baptist or Bellhaven on Friday, see Thursday's Havre Daily News.