KANSAS CITY — At the highest level of competition, especially in a tight game, every error seems to be magnified. Turnovers proved to be crucial in the Montana State University-Northern Lights' first-round game at the 2012 Buffalo Funds NAIA DI Mens’ Basketball National Championship.

The Northern Lights have been in Kansas City, MO since late Monday night. They were anxiously waiting the tipoff for their Wednesday night game the second they landed, but the end result was less than desirable. In first round action, the No. 15 Columbia College Cougars came from behind to defeat the Lights 58-52, knocking the Lights out of the hunt for a national title.

The Lights led for the majority of the game. They took a 2-0 lead to start, and never trailed in the first half. It wasn’t until the 9:18 mark in the second that the Lights ever fell behind, the Cougars taking a 39-37 lead. But when turnovers occur on a stage like a national tournament, it is hard to get by a team as good as the Cougars. On the night, the Lights had 13 total turnovers, seven in the first half and six in the second. The Cougars had just six. And when the Lights needed ball control the most, the final three minutes of the game, they had two crucial turnovers, turning a 50-47 deficit into a 58-52 loss.

“It was a tough loss,” MSU-N head coach Shawn Huse said. "We put ourselves in a good position, but we have to give credit to Columbia, they played solid. I think we had a couple turnovers in each half that really haunted us, and that was the difference.

“I have to give a lot of credit to LaVon (Myers),” Huse added. “He handled the ball very well against a team that was trying to get all over him. But we could have easily had about 20 turnovers, and a lot of teams do. Columbia gets teams to burp up the ball, to play too fast and to get out of their comfort zone. For the most part we were solid and poised, but at the end of the day, there were a couple of times where we would have liked to have been a little more poised and taken care of the ball in key situations.”

What made the loss even tougher for the Lights was the fact that they held the lead for the most of the game.

After going up 2-0 to start the contest, the Lights battled through a slow start to maintain the edge. After seven minutes of play, Northern led 5-4, but after a quick timeout, the Lights returned to the floor with some fluidity. In the final 13 minutes of the first half the Lights outscored the Cougars 23-18. MSU-N started the game shooting 2-of-9 from the field, but finished the first half shooting 47 percent from the field and 5-of-10 from behind the 3-point arc. Joe Simpson and Shaun Tatarka both paced the Lights with six points each in the opening half. Tatarka was 2-of-2 from 3-point range.

But in the second half, the Lights didn’t maintain their new found level of shot making all the way through. And it was mostly due the very tough defensive pressure from the Cougars. While MSU-N came in as the
top scoring defense in the NAIA, Columbia was right behind them at No. 2
and the Cougars made some solid defensive adjusments at halftime.

In the first five minutes after intermission, the Lights quickly went up 37-33,
on treys by both Tatarka and Myers. But for nearly seven minutes, stretching
until the 8:33 mark, the Lights didn’t score a point, committing three
turnovers in the stretch and shooting 0-of-8 from the field, and 0-of-5 from
three range.

“It was a battle,” Tatarka said. “They (Cougars) played tough defense, but
we turned the ball over too much too. We needed to take care of the ball a
little better if we were going to win. We went down fighting and that is all we
can do.

“We knew our shot would be available no matter what,” Myers added. “As
long as we ran our stuff. The three was open tonight and we didn’t shoot as
well as we would have liked, but it was open.”

Tatarka led the Lights' efforts with 15 points, while Myers followed with 14 of
his own. Simpson also finished with 11 for the Lights. Northern was also 6-
of-10 from the foul line as eight Lights' seniors played their final game of
their career.

In that same stretch the Cougars took the lead and never gave it up.

“We led most of that game,” Huse said. “And that is the most disappointing
thing. We did what we wanted to for about a half and a quarter, but down
the stretch we didn’t. If that (3-pointers) is what they give you, then that is
what you have to do, knock those down. I didn’t think we shot as well as we
needed to, I guess we missed too many in the second half. But give
Columbia credit, they wear on teams with their defense, and look at our
shooting percentage, that proves that. We just needed a couple more shots
to fall.”

In the second half the Lights shot 34 percent from the field and 27 percent
from 3-point range. They shot 41 percent on the night.

The Cougars wound up shooting 47 percent on the night against Northern’s
very stout defense. Columbia was just 1-of-6 from behind the arc, instead
using their 6-8 big man, Jordan Dressler to do damage. Dressler kept the
Cougars in contention with 10 points in the first half and 10 more in the
second, none coming from more than a step or two outside of the paint.

“Our defense did just about everything they could against a big team,” Huse
said. “And that was a defensive ball game all the way, there is no question.”

Northern’s defense shut everybody else down in the first half, forcing
Dressler to carry the load. But in the second half Dressler got his guards
more involved after some tweaks to the offense. Devin Griffin an Henrique
Medeiros combined for just five first half points, but combined for 26 when it
was all said and done.

“We really tried to run our offense through him (Dressler),” Columbia head coach Bob Burchard said. “He
is an amazing passer. In the first half we had him away from the basket, but we adjusted in the second
half and played him closer, so we could start playing off of him. I thought that was critical, because he
and our guards started playing together. Northern is such a strong defensive team, they really had us
pressed out and we used him to relieve that.
"We kept talking to our team about being stubborn,” Burchard added. “It seemed like we were down by one for an eternity. We had four or five cracks at it, but couldn’t get on top. At no point in time did we put our chins on our chest, we just hung in there and stayed stubborn.”

It was not how the Lights wanted to end a magical season, but all great things have to come to an end at one point or another.

“These guys played hard,” Huse said. “We have a great group of guys that have done a lot for our program and for Havre, and I am really proud of them.

“It hurts for this great event to come to an end,” Tatarka added. “But we had a lot of success this year, and a lot of people don’t get the opportunity that we did. We did a lot of great things this year and we really wanted to win, and we really worked hard so we could get the first round victory, but things don’t always go your way and that is life. We just have to keep our heads up.”

Columbia is now 27-7 and will face Oklahoma Baptist in the second round on Friday night. Northern finished the season with an overall record of 27-7, and a trip to their second straight national tournament and sixth in the programs history. The Lights also set a school record for overall victories in a single season.

**Lights finish the season 27-7**

**Columbia 58, Lights 52**

**CC** — Wendell Crowder 0-3 2-2 2, Henrique Medeiros 3-7 6-8 13, Taylor Evans 1-3 2-4 4, Hal Payne 2-4 0-0 4, Jordan Dressler 10-15 0-2 20, Devin Griffin 4-9 5-5 13, Ben Bowman 0-0 0-0 0, Tanner Sutton 0-1 0-0 0, Marquette Murrell 1-1 0-2 2, Matt Woodcock 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 21-44 15-23 58.

**MSU-N** — Sean Kelly 1-3 0-0 2, Joe Simpson 5-10 1-2 11, Devin Jackson 1-5 0-0 3, Shaun Tatarka 4-7 3-3 15, LaVon Myers 5-10 2-4 14, David Maddock 1-4 0-1 2, Jordan Harris 1-1 0-0 2, Chris Brown 0-0 0-0 0, Ben Mitchell 1-5 0-0 3, Corbin Pearson 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 19-46 6-10 52.