Lights trounce Lethbridge
George Ferguson
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The Montanan State University-Northern men’s basketball team is brand new this season, with four new starters, new role players and a lot of young talent trying to come together. Still, in five road games to open the season, the Lights got off to an impressive 5-0 start.

On Friday night at the Armory Gymnasium, the No. 21 Lights got off to an even more impressive home start as they dusted the Lethbridge Pronghorns 86-36. The win extended Northern’s home winning streak into the 2012-13 season, a streak which dates back to February of 2010.

And though Northern made Friday night’s win look easy, MSU-N head coach Shawn Huse said his team is still finding itself early on.

“Lethbridge is improved,” Huse said. “But I think tonight, we just got off to a really good start, and the big key was, we played as well, if not better defensively, than we did offensively. And playing good defense is something we strive to do every single night.

“So it was a nice win for us and one in which I thought we played very well,” he added. “We are by no means where we need to be yet. But we saw some really good signs tonight.”

The good signs were everywhere on a night when it snowed outside, but the Lights were very hot inside.

Northern used six made 3-pointers in the first half to bury the Pronghorns. The Lights ran off a 17-1 run, with Mike LaValley and Jesse Vaughan both making triples, while Alfie Miller put in two of his own. The run gave MSU-N a commanding 19-3 lead halfway through the first half, and added three’s by Dontae Clark and Savion Udeh sparked the Lights to an insurmountable 42-11 halftime advantage.

Defensively, MSU-N was just as sharp in the first 20 minutes, holding the Pronghorns to a staggering 15 percent shooting and also forcing them into 18 turnovers.

“Any time you can have a start like that, it’s big,” Huse said. “We came out and shot the ball pretty well. I thought we had some good movement and good patience on offense and we got the shots we wanted. And again, defensively, that was as good a start as we’ve had this season. So I’m really proud of the guys for coming in ready to go and getting after it right away.”

The second half was no better for Lethbridge. MSU-N’s defense continued to stifle the Horns’ as they didn’t reach the 20-point plateau until there were just eight minutes left in the game. Meanwhile, Clark continued his fine shooting, hitting a couple more triples, while the Lights’ bench, including Anfernee Standing Rock and Pat Jensen gave Northern quality minutes down the stretch.

And with such a decisive lead throughout the night, Huse was able to really get a good look at every player on his bench. Northern saw 12 different Lights get into the score column, with Vaughan scoring 12 points and grabbing six rebounds. Nilson Santana came off the bench to score 12, while Clark added 11
off the bench, including three trey’s. Miller scored 10 points, and Devin Jackson and Will Perry each scored eight. The Lights went 9-for-21 from three, forced the Pronghorns into 27 turnovers and held them to an abysmal 26 percent from the field.

“I think everybody got in and contributed in one way or another,” Huse said. “We always say, if we’re going to be a solid team and make a good run, we have to have a good bench, and I thought all of those guys came in and gave us a nice lift tonight.

“It was a good win against a team who has played some Frontier teams pretty tough already this season,” he added. “So it’s nice to get that first home win under our belt.”

The Lights (6-0) will be back at the Armory Gymnasium on Saturday night to host a tough NAIA rival in the Warner-Pacific Knights.

Lights 86, Lethbridge 36

UL – Derek Waldner 5-9 0-3 10, Nikola Kovac 1-2 2-2 4, Chaz Johnson 3-11 1-2 9, Morris Spear-Chief 0-3 1-4 1, Morgan Duce 4-7 0-0 10, Spencer Wetzel 0-7 2-5 2. Totals: 13-50 6-16 36.

MSU-N – Corbin Pearson 1-3 0-0 2, Jesse Vaughan 3-9 5-5 12, Roshaun West 1-1 0-2 2, Devin Jackson 4-10 0-0 8, Savion Udeh 2-3 2-2 7, Dontae Clark 4-6 0-0 11, Anfernee Standing Rock 1-3 0-0 2, Mike LaValley 2-3 0-0 5, Nilson Santana 6-8 0-2 12, Will Perry 4-4 0-0 8, Alfie Miller 3-7 2-2 10, Pat Jensen 3-5 0-0 6. Totals: 34-63 9-13 86.

Halftime: MSU-N 42-11. 3-point field goals: MSU-N 9-21 (Vaughan 1, Udeh 1, Clark 3, LaValley 1, Miller 2), UL 4-16 (Johnson 2, Duce 2), Rebounds: MSU-N 35 (Vaughan 6), UL 25 (Kovac 9), Fouls: MSU-N 11, UL 13, Fouled out: None. Technical Fouls: Waldner.