Lights sweep Jimmies in exciting fashion

George Ferguson
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It’s not often the Montana State University-Northern men’s basketball team faces the same opponent in back-to-back games. Those days are gone with the old-school Frontier Conference.

But the No. 23 Lights harkened back to the days of old this past weekend, taking on the Jamestown Jimmies in a pair of Thanksgiving weekend day games at the Armory Gymnasium.

On Friday afternoon, the Lights survived in a 55-54 win over the NAIA DII Jimmies, then capped off the weekend sweep with a thrilling 68-66 win over Jamestown on Saturday afternoon.

The two wins over the Jimmies (7-4) were big, considering they were a national tournament team a year ago, and were built much like a Frontier Conference opponent. And that was key because the Lights (9-2) will open league play this Friday against rival Carroll College.

“Very proud of our guys,” Northern head coach Shawn Huse said after Saturday’s victory. “Credit Jamestown, they are a very good team, they play great defense and they never quit in either game. They kept on fighting us and just would not go away in either game.

“So for us to win two really close, physical games like that,” he added. “That was big. And it was a team effort in both games. Every guy stepped up. We got great play from our bench in both games, and we really played great, team basketball, and we needed to because those were two really tough, hard-fought games.”

Indeed. Both games were eerily similar in how they went. But Saturday’s affair came down to one big shot, and a couple key defensive stops for the Lights.

Northern lost a comfortable eight-point lead in the second half when the Jimmies went on a 14-2 run and led 59-54 with just over four minutes left in the contest. But The Lights climbed right back into the game as Jesse Vaughan hit a 3-pointer at the 4:36 mark, then scored nine more points to pull the Lights to within 66-64 with :36 left.

And that’s when Alfie Miller stepped up and made the biggest shot of weekend.

With just :18 left in the game, Miller was found open at the top of the key and he calmly knocked down a trey that gave the Lights a one-point lead. On Jamestown’s next possession, Miller stole a pass, then made a free throw, and from there, the Lights staved off two Jamestown looks at a game-tying shot.

“Our guys did a good job of finding him,” Huse said of Miller’s game-winning shot. “And it was a great shot because he had a guy rushing at him pretty hard, so he had to get it up quick. Then he goes down and makes a big play on defense for us. He really stepped up big at the end of the game today.”
The Lights had to step up big all day long in order to slay the Jimmies for a second straight game.

MSU-N got off to a hot start and led 16-7 early on. But Jamestown erased that lead with a 12-2 run, while the Lights went seven minutes without a field goal. And Northern had to get a Roshawn West three at the end of the half to take a slim, 27-26 lead into the break.

But as Jamestown did so many times, the Jimmies fought back. After a three by Miller, big plays in the paint by Will Perry and a driving layup by Devin Jackson, the Lights led by seven points midway through the second half, before Jamestown battled back, setting up the exciting finish.

“Our defense really was key for us in both games,” Huse said. “Because we just never really seemed to totally click offensively this weekend. Credit Jamestown for a lot of that because they really defend well. But it was one of those things where, we had to get stop after stop because we couldn’t ever hit a shot or make a big play to really put the game away. So I’m really proud of how hard our guys fought on defense this weekend.”

In Saturday’s win, the Lights got a team-high 20 points from Vaughan, while Jackson added 13. Perry came up big with 12 points and 10 rebounds, while Miller and West each scored nine. The Lights made just seven three’s, but did shoot 50 percent from the field, while MSU-N’s defense turned the Jimmies over 17 times and held them to just three triples.

Black Friday Win

Saturday’s exciting game at the Armory Gymnasium was just a repeat of what went down on Friday afternoon as the Lights found a way to eke out a one-point win over the Jimmies.

Once again, both teams watched surges by the other. First, it was Jamestown, which started the game with a quick 10-4 lead. Then, the Lights battled back to take a 21-20 lead behind a couple of big plays from Devin Jackson. However, the lead was short-lived as the Jimmies finished the first half on a 7-0 run and led 28-25 at halftime.

Northern shot just 29 percent from the field in the first half, while the Jimmies shot 45 percent and made all three of their 3-pointers in the first 20 minutes.

But as tough a half as the Lights had, they looked like a completely different team in the first 10 minutes of the second stanza. Northern ripped off a 15-0 run, which included three triples by Alfie Miller, and when the dust settled, the Lights were in front 45-36 with nine minutes to go.

But the story of the weekend was never giving up, and the Jimmies never did. Jamestown scored the next 10 points and surged back in front, 45-43 with six minutes remaining.

“It was obvious in that first game, they (Jimmies) were not going to go away,” Huse said. “In that game, and again on Saturday, we were able to build some momentum in the second half, and they could have just packed it in a couple of times. But there was no quit in them, and they kept on fighting back, and
that’s where we were very good this weekend. We really stuck together as a team in some tough situations. We shared the basketball, made the right passes, everybody made key hustle plays and we played great team defense and those things really carried us through.”

And while the Lights did all of those things well, they were in for a wild Friday finish.

After falling behind by one, the Lights again surged. They got two three’s from Roshawn West and found themselves leading 55-47 with 3:40 to go. But one more time, Jamestown fought back. The Jimmies held the Lights scoreless the rest of the way and climbed to within one point with 12 ticks left on the clock. But just as he did on Saturday, Jamestown’s Mark Hoge missed a game-winning attempt at the buzzer and the Lights managed to avoid Black Friday being a dark day.

“We just had to really buckle down defensively down the stretch of that game,” Huse said. “And the guys did that. They never gave up and they played hard. That was a total team effort out there, and I’m really proud of the way the guys fought.”

In Friday’s win, Jackson scored 15 points and West made four three’s on his way to 12. Miller added nine points off the bench and Perry tallied eight points and six boards. Northern’s defense was again stellar, forcing Jamestown into 18 turnovers and holding the Jimmies to just three trey’s and 37 percent shooting for the game.

“Just really proud of these guys for all they did and how hard they fought this weekend,” Huse said. “These were important games for us, because either way, they are going to help us prepare for what we’ll see in conference. And it’s nice to be able to walk out of here with two wins.”

The Lights will now turn their attention to their Frontier Conference opener Friday night against Carroll. MSU-N then returns to nonconference action with a game against New Hope Christian on Saturday night.

Close Calls

**Lights 55, Jamestown 54**

**JC** — Davon Thomas 9-21 3-6 21, Dan Janu 1-2 2-2 4, Breshion Tucker 1-4 3-6 5, Mark Hoge 6-17 2-3 14, Beny Collins 0-1 1-2 1, Jesse Behn 4-7 2-4 10. Totals: 21-57 9-17 54.

**MSU-N** — Will Perry 3-4 1-1 8, Jesse Vaughan 1-14 2-2 4, Roshawn West 4-6 0-1 12, Devin Jackson 6-13 3-5 15, Alan Brown 1-3 1-4 4, Corbin Pearson 1-1 2-2 4, Savion Udeh 0-4 0-0 0, Mike LaValley 0-0 0-0 0, Pat Jensen 0-2 0-2 0, Alfie Miller 2-9 3-3 8. Totals: 18-56 12-20 55.


**Lights 68, Jamestown 66**

**JC** — Davon Thomas 6-12 0-0 10, Dan Janu 1-1 0-0 2, Breshion Tucker 2-3 1-2 3, Taylor Newton 1-3 0-0 2, Mark Hoge 8-14 6-6 23, Jared Sutherland 2-5 0-1 4, Beny Collins 3-6 0-3 9, Jesse Behn 2-4 0-1 5. Totals: 25-28 13-19 66.
**MSU-N** — Will Perry 5-9 2-2 12, Jesse Vaughan 7-12 3-5 20, Roshawn West 4-7 0-0 9, Devin Jackson 4-11 3-7 13, Alan Brown 1-3 0-0 2, Corbin Pearson 1-4 1-4 3, Dontae Clark 0-0 0-2 0, Savion Udeh 0-1 0-0 0, Mike LaValley 0-0 0-0 0, Pat Jensen 0-0 0-0 0, Alfie Miller 3-6 1-2 9. Totals: 25-53 11-22 68.