The Montana State University-Northern men’s basketball team had just two games left on its non-conference schedule. And though the trip was tough, the Lights took care of business.

Last Thursday night, the Lights thrashed Portland Bible College, 81-63 in Portland, Ore., then MSU-N wrapped up its 2012 schedule with a hard-fought, 71-67 win over NCAA DII Linfield College last Friday night in McMinville, Ore.

The wins pushed the No. 22 Lights to 13-2 ahead of the full Frontier Conference season, which begins in early January.

And Friday night’s non-conference finale against the Linfield Wildcats certainly gave MSU-N a good test before league play begins.

The Lights had to hold off a hard-charging Wildcat squad, and a 38-point performance by Linfield’s Andrew Batiuk to earn the close win.

“We got off to a great start, led by our senior (Devin Jackson), on both ends of the floor,” MSU-N head coach Shawn Huse said. “We all felt like we should have done a better job putting them (Wildcats) away, but in the end were very pleased with the outcome. That is a very long road trip and Linfield played a great game to make things interesting down the stretch. Ultimately we handled it and, in particular, got big shots from everyone when we needed them, including insurance free throws from Roshawn (West), Devin, and Mike (LaValley) in the end.”

Northern led the Wildcats 33-25 at halftime, and the Lights kept the lead for the entire second half, though things got interesting when Batiuk hit his sixth 3-pointer of the game, to make the score 66-64 with :40 left. However, as Huse noted, the Lights were stellar from the foul line down the stretch and were able to put Linfield away at the charity stripe.

Jackson led MSU-N with 25 points, while as a team, MSU-N made 10 triples. Jesse Vaughan added a solid 15 points and five rebounds, while Roshawn West chipped in with 10 points, and Alfie Miller hit a pair of three’s off the bench. Batiuk’s 38 points for Linfield included six three’s, while he also grabbed a game-high 11 boards.

And while things were tough on Friday night, the Lights had little trouble shooting down Portland Bible College Thursday night. MSU-N got off to a hot start, draining seven first-half 3-pointers on the way to the easy victory.

“We did a good job of executing and defending against a very quick Portland Bible team,” Huse said. “They had been scoring the ball very well in past weeks but our perimeter defense did a nice job of keeping them from getting in any kind of real shooting rhythm. In the first half we definitely showed signs of rust from the past few weeks off, as well as sluggishness from the trip, And PBC did a good job of attacking us early and often. In the end however we shook it off and I was very pleased with our overall effort on the night.”

With two wins last week in tow, the Lights will now prepare for Frontier play next week. MSU-N hosts Dickinson State Jan. 3 and Rocky Mountain College Jan. 4.
Lights 71, Linfield 67

