Lights tame Bulldogs; Dawgs thump Skylights
George Ferguson
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The Montana State University-Northern men’s basketball team isn’t a one-dimensional offense. And the Lights are as stingy as ever defensively.

Those things were quite clear Thursday night as Northern went into Dillon and beat the UM-Western Bulldogs 64-53 in a key Frontier Conference clash. The win was the No. 10 Lights first in Dillon in three years, and it kept them unbeaten in league play heading into Saturday’s showdown at UM-Western.

And the Lights beat the Bulldogs methodically. Northern made just one 3-pointer on the night, but the Lights went an astounding 21-for-26 from the free-throw-line, while shooting 51 percent from the field, and holding Western to 25 percent shooting and tying the much-taller Bulldogs on the boards, 32-32.

“Obviously, tonight’s game was won on the defensive end,” Northern head coach Shawn Huse said. “I’m very proud of the effort and intensity our guys brought tonight, and when you can hold a high-scoring team like Western to 53 points, you’re doing something right on defense.

“But I also thought we showed we were able to really be patient and grind one out on offense too,” he continued. “Credit Western, they played great defense and they didn’t go away. But for us to only make on three and still win like we did, that was something I’m really proud of. Our guys were really poised and really patient, and they played hard and executed really well.”

It was a sloppy game early on, but it quickly turned into more of a defensive battle, and that’s a battle the Lights will win almost every time. Northern led 6-2 early on, but after 16 minutes, the game was tied at a scant 12-12. However, the Lights picked up the pace late in the half, and a technical foul on Western head coach Steve Keller, with only a few seconds left in the first half, gave the Lights an additional four free points and a 23-19 halftime edge.

MSU-N shot much better in the second half, especially at the start. It took the Lights just three minutes to up their lead to 11 points as Devin Jackson and Corbin Pearson made key layups. From there, Northern worked the clock, played great defense, and also overcame one last Western run. The Bulldogs closed the gap to four points with just under five minutes to play, but the Lights didn’t falter. Dontae Clark made two key buckets in the final three minutes and the Lights were nearly perfect from the foul line, going 9-of-11 down the stretch.

Jackson paced the Lights with 18 points and a perfect 10-for-10 performance from the charity stripe. But Northern got big contributions from all over. Clark scored a season-high 10 points off the bench, while Pearson added eight. Roshawn West scored 11 and Jesse Vaughan added 10 before fouling out. Once again, Will Perry led the Lights on the boards with six.

“You have to credit Dontae Clark,” Huse said. “That’s a guy who doesn’t get a ton of minutes, but tonight, he really made the most of them. He gets ten points, and made some important free throws. Again, our entire bench was ready to go tonight, and they really gave us a big lift.”
Western, which has now lost to the Lights in seven of the last 11 meetings, fell to 1-3 in the Frontier, and got 18 points from Maazin Butler, though he shot just 5-of-18 from the floor. The bulldogs really struggled in the second half, making just one triple and shooting 18 percent.

The Lights, who are 4-0 in the Frontier and 16-2 overall, will now turn their attention to perhaps the biggest game of the season thus far. Northern will be in Salt Lake City to face the No. 17 Westminster Griffins Saturday night.

"I'm just really proud of this team,” Huse said. "They continue to work hard and give a great effort every night, and they did that again tonight. We haven't won at Western in a while, and I think these guys came down here wanting to show something and they did that. Now, we just have to get ready to go and play hard for 40 minutes again on Saturday night.”

Bulldogs collar Skylights

Going into Thursday night’s Frontier Conference women’s basketball game in Dillon, it was safe to say the Montana State University-Northern Skylights were playing well, while the Um-Western Bulldogs were not.

However, it didn’t take long for the Bulldogs to flip the script.

Western picked up its first conference win of the season Thursday night, at the expense of the Skylights, as the Bulldogs ran past Northern 75-49. The loss dropped MSU-N to 2-2 in the Frontier and 10-6 overall, also snapping a three-game winning streak in the process.

And while Northern came into Thursday night’s contest playing well, including a defensive gem of a performance against Rocky Mountain College last Friday in Havre, shooting was the story in Dillon. The Skylights shot a dismal 29 percent from the field against Western, while the Bulldogs buried eight 3-pointers and shot 50 percent from the floor.

"Western man-handled us all over the floor,” Northern head coach Chris Mouat said. "They beat us in every single phase of the game, and in every stat. The most important stat was effort. Western came out focused and prepared and we didn’t. We came out flat and not ready to go. And that kind of effort is unacceptable. That's disappointing because in most of our games this season, I felt like we played harder than our opponents. But tonight, Western played harder than us and we didn’t respond to it. As coaches and players, we’re going to have to take a hard look in the mirror and deal with what happened tonight, and then dust ourselves.”

Northern recovered from a 9-2 Bulldog lead early on, but Western took command of the game in the final 10 minutes of the first half. The Bulldogs ripped off consecutive runs of 8-0, including triples by Jenna Banks and Roxy Thurman. The collective spurts in the final 10 minutes gave the Bulldogs a 35-22 lead at halftime, and though it was manageable for the Northern, the Skylights really never recovered.

MSU-N did cut the Western lead to 10 points several times in the early stages of the second half, but Banks and Thurman continued to make big shots, and Western would eventually lead by as many as 26 points, and win going away.

Rebounding was another critical factor in the Skylights’ loss at Western. The Bulldogs out-rebounded the Skylights 45-31, and while Northern held the league’s leading scorer, Sammi Bignell to just six points, she did have a game-high 10 rebounds.
On the offensive end, it was a night when Western just couldn’t miss. Banks led four Bulldogs in double figures with 17 points, while Thurman added 16. Together, the duo made five trey’s.

On the other end of the spectrum, the Skylights struggled mightily on offense. Nikki Tresch scored 10 points, but made just one three and went 2-of-10 from the floor. Kassie Barta had a strong game off the bench, scoring 10 points, but Northern Stars Jordan Bruursema, Kylee Denham and Laci Keller were held to a combined 17 points, and Keller left the game in the second half with an injury. The Skylights also committed a game-high 16 turnovers.

“There were times tonight that I thought we dug our heels in and did some nice things,” Mouat said. “But for the most part, Western came out and took it from us, and we never responded when they did. They made shots, layups, they played good defense and they rebounded well, and we did just the opposite.

“So we’re going to go back and watch the film, try to learn from this game,” Mouat added. “And go down to Westminster and give it our best shot. In this league, especially on the road, you’re going to have some tough games, you’re going to not play as well as you’d like. But it was our effort that I was most disappointed in tonight. So we just have to learn from this and be ready to play a very good Westminster team on Saturday night.”

Northern will look to rebound from Thursday night’s loss on Saturday, but that won’t be easy considering MSU-N travels to Salt Lake City to face the league-leading and fourth-ranked Westminster Griffins (3-0, 14-2). The Skylights return home to face Montana Tech next Friday and Lewis-Clark State next Saturday.

UM-Western 75, Skylights 49

**MSU-N** – Jordan Bruursema 3-10 0-1 7, Taylor Cummings 0-5 0-1 0, Kylee Denham 1-4 1-3 4, Laci Keller 1-4 4-4 6, Nikki Tresch 2-10 5-6 10, Kassie Barta 4-8 0-0 10, Rachelle Bennett 1-3 0-0 2, Kacie McKeon 3-9 0-0 7, Maurisha McKissic 1-2 1-2 3,. Totals 16-55 11-17 49.

**UM-W** – J. Banks 5-8 4-4 17, S. Bignell 3-8 3-4 6, K. Matthies 4-6 3-4 11, R. Thurman 6-9 2-2 16, A. Wilson 5-8 0-0 10, K. Callaghan 0-4 0-1 0, K. Kerbs 3-5 0-0 7, A Lawler 1-3 0-0 3, B. Leibenguth 2-7 0-0 5,. Totals: 29-59 9-13 75.

Halftime: Western 35-22. 3-point field goals: MSU-N 6-18 (Bruursema 1, Denham 1, Tresch 1, Barta 2, McKeon 1), UM-W 8-18 (Banks 3, Thurman 2, Kerbs 2, Lawler 1). Rebounds: MSU-N 31 (McKeon 4), UM-W 45 (Bignell 10). Fouls: MSU-N 12, UM-W 15. Fouled out: Matthies.

Lights 64, UM-Western 53

**MSU-N** – Alan Brown 0-3 0-2 0, Devin Jackson 4-7 10-10 18, Will Perry 0-2 1-2 1, Jesse Vaughan 4-8 2-2 10, Roshawn West 4-7 2-3 11, Dontae Clark 4-4 2-4 10, Mike LaValley 1-4 0-0 1, Alfie Miller 0-0 2-2 2, Corbin Pearson 3-4 2-2 8, Savion Udeh 1-2 0-0 2. Totals: 21-41 21-26 64.

**UM-W** – M. Butler 5-18 7-9 18, K. Castro 0-5 2-2 2, T. Miller 1-7 0-0 2, J. Owsley 2-4 8-9 12, G. Rucker 1-4 0-0 3, A. Mailey 0-0 3-4 3, J. Overstreet 2-3 3-4 8, V. Turk 1-3 2-2 4, C. Woodill 0-1 1-2 1,. Totals: 12-49 26-32 53.