Winter Storm Gandolf wasn’t the only thing that got in the way of the Montana State University-Northern basketball teams this weekend. The Westminster Griffins proved to be a major road block for the Lights and Skylights as well.

The No. 10 Lights were in Salt lake City Saturday night with a chance to put a real stranglehold on the Frontier Conference standings early on. A road win at No. 17 Westminster, coupled with No. 3 Lewis-Clark State’s first loss of the season would have put MSU-N all alone in first place in the league standings.

But Westminster, which was off to a shocking 1-3 start in conference play, had other ideas. The Griffins took it to the Lights early and often in what became one of Northern’s worst losses in recent memory as the Griffins won 82-50.

“It kind of felt like the perfect storm,” Northern head coach Shawn Huse said. “We were streaking, they (Griffins) were slipping. We were probably due to have an off night and they were due to play well because they are a very good team. That’s pretty much what happened. And on this night, they were really good, and we were anything but.”

The start to the game was pretty indicative of how things would go for the Lights, who had won 10 games in a row coming in. Northern went the first four minutes of the contest without a basket, and in that stretch, the Lights actually only got off one shot attempt. Meanwhile, Westminster went on runs of 7-0 and 13-3, and also forced the Lights into 12 turnovers en route to a 40-26 halftime lead.

And though the deficit certainly wasn’t insurmountable, things only got worse for the Lights in the second half. The Griffins opened the half on a 14-4 run, and basically slammed the door on any chance of a Northern comeback.

“They (Griffins) set the tone with their defense, and we helped out with some really bad turnovers,” Huse said. “On the other end, we didn’t do a good job of defending them in the post and we left shooters open too many teams. It just wasn’t a good night from us defensively, and that’s disappointing. The game was never over. Our guys didn’t quit fighting. But the tone was set by the way Westminster played in that first half. They deserve all the credit for that.”

Indeed. Northern struggled on both ends of the floor. The Lights allowed the Griffins to score 21 more points than MSU-N was allowing all season. On the other end, Northern shot a dismal 29 percent from the field and committed seven more turnovers than the Lights were averaging.

While the Griffins had four players score in double figures, including an 18-point, 10-rebound double-double from Tallon Robertson, only Devin Jackson reached double digits for the Lights with 10 points. Jesse Vaughan, Roshawn West and Alfie Miller each scored six points.

The loss was MSU-N’s first in conference play, and it was a rough one. But with Rocky Mountain College’s win over LC State Saturday night, the Lights remain tied for first at 4-1. MSU-N is 16-3 overall and will return home for games against Montana Tech Friday night, and a huge showdown with the Warriors on Saturday.

“I’m disappointed, the guys are disappointed, especially with how we executed tonight,” Huse said. “We really took one on the chin tonight, and now we’ll see how this group responds to that. We’ll see if we can
learn from this one, put it behind us and move forward because in this league, that’s what you have to do.”

Griffins too much for Skylights

The MSU-Northern women’s basketball team got the weekend off to a rough start on Thursday night with a lopsided loss at UM-Western. Things didn’t get any better for the Skylights Saturday night I Salt Lake City.

A visit to No. 4 Westminster Saturday night proved to be just as rough as the Griffins pounded the Skylights 72-43. The loss dropped Northern to 2-3 in the Frontier Conference and 10-7 overall.

“You can’t turn the ball over against a really good team like Westminster, and that’s what we did,” Northern head coach Chris Mouat said. “We turned it over and they made us pay. They had 30 points off of turnovers so it was like they scored every single time we gave the ball away. We also got killed on the board. So those two things really hurt us.

“Our effort and focus was much better,” Mouat added. “I thought the kids played really hard and we did some really good things defensively. But there’s a reason they (Westminster) are ranked as high as they are. They are the real deal and they showed that tonight.”

The Griffins did show it, especially on the defensive end. Westminster was allowing an NAIA best 49 points per game, and the Skylights fell short of that by six points. Northern hung tough early, but a late run by the Griffins in the first half made it a 37-16 halftime lead. And with Westminster playing at such a high level defensively, the Skylights didn’t have much of a chance at a second-half comeback.

“We really hurt ourselves too many times tonight,” Mouat said. “We were playing well, but we turned it over a couple of times at the end of the first half and they made us pay and the lead got to be too big for us to overcome. We just shot ourselves in the foot too many times.”

Jordan Bruursema scored 10 points to lead the Skylights, while Nikki Tresch added eight and Kylee Denham scored six. The Griffins got 19 points from Kelsi Wells, while Cydney Tibbetts finished with a 13 and 10 double-double.

After the two tough road losses, Northern will look to regroup at home this coming weekend. The Skylights host Montana Tech on Friday night and Lewis-Clark State Saturday.

“We just have to learn from this and move forward,” Mouat said. “There are a lot of games left, and we’re looking forward to getting back home and moving on from this.”

Westminster 72, Skylights 43

**MSU-N** – Jordan Bruursema 4-8 2-3 10, Taylor Cummings 1-3 2-2 4, Kylee Denham 2-7 1-2 6, Maurisha McKissic 1-5 0-0 2, Nikki Tresch 2-8 2-2 8, Kassie Barta 1-3 0-0 3, Rachelle Bennett 1-1 0-0 2, Laci Keller 2-3 0-0 5, Kacie McKeon 1-5 0-0 3. Totals: 15-43 7-9 43.

**WC** – A. Eastman 4-8 0-2 10, B. Larsen 1-3 1-2 3, C. Tibbetts 4-12 4-4 13, K. Wells 7-11 4-5 19, N. Yazzie 5-9 2-2 13, T. Pappas 2-3 1-2 6, B. Blonquist 2-5 2-4 5, O. Pierce-Eiselein 2-3 1-2 1, Totals: 26-55 15-25 72.

Westminster 82, Lights 50

**MSU-N** – Roshawn West 2-9 2-2 6, Devin Jackson 5-11 2-2 10, Corbin Pearson 0-8 1-2 1, Dontae Clark 0-1 1-1 1, Savion Udeh 2-4 1-1 6, Allan Brown 0-0 2-2 2, Mike LaValley 1-4 0-1 3, Will Perry 2-3 1-1 5, Jesse Vaughan 1-4 4-4 6, Alfie Miller 2-6 0-0 6. Totals: 15-51 14-16 50.

**WC** – A. Dreksel 4-6 4-4 12, Jordan Pryor 1-4 0-0 2, Jake Orchard 3-8 2-2 8, Tallon Robertson 7-9 0-0 14, Jordan Hayter 4-6 3-3 11, Travis Tucker 2-2 0-0 6, Adam Rainbird 1-3 0-0 3, Jordan Bjornberg 3-7 0-0 6, Jordan Hamilton 1-4 0-0 2, B. Skidmore 6-10 5-7 18. Totals: 32-60 14-16 82.

Halftime: Westminster 40-26. 3-point field goals: MSU-N 6-20 (Jackson 2, Miller 2, LaValley 1, Udeh 1), WC 4-8 (Skidmore 1, Tucker 2, Rainbird 1). Rebounds: MSU-N 31 (Vaughan 6), WC 36 (Robertson 10). Fouls: MSU-N 17, WC 19. Fouled out: None.