Lights silence Orediggers, fall to Warriors
George Ferguson
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The Montana State University-Northern men’s basketball team started the weekend off by taking care of business exactly the way the Lights planned too. Unfortunately for the Lights, those plans got nixed one night later.

The No. 12 Lights opened a huge Frontier Conference home stand by blasting Montana Tech 82-68 Friday night at the Armory Gymnasium. But Saturday night, things came undone as the No. 3 Lewis-Clark State Warriors handled the Lights 79-65 in a nationally-ranked showdown. The loss to the Warriors was the Lights’ second league loss in their last three games, but at 5-2, MSU-N is still tied with LC State and UGF for first place in the Frontier.

And though things went south on the Lights Saturday night, they didn’t start out that way against the up-start Orediggers on Friday.

Alfie Miller broke a 10-10 tie with back-to-back 3-pointers, and when Miller again went back-to-back later in the first half, the Lights were in front 30-15 and they never looked back.

MSU-N led 38-24 at halftime and the Orediggers would fail to get the game into single digits in the final 20 minutes. Northern’s trademark defense was key as the Lights held Tech, the top 3-point shooting team in the NAIA to just five made trey’s. The Lights also forced Tech into seven first-half turnovers to help build the lead, while in the second half, triples by Corbin Pearson, Jesse Vaughan and Mike LaValley helped spark the Lights to a 13-2 run that pretty much put the Orediggers away for good.

The win was a nice response to MSU-N’s 32-point loss at Westminster last Saturday, and senior Devin Jackson, who scored 12 points against the Diggers’ was proud of the way his team bounced back.

“We all knew what we needed to do, as individuals and as a team, to come back from that loss,” Jackson said. “We worked hard this week to get better. We came out strong tonight and we played better defense. Tech is a good shooting team and we knew we had to win on ‘D’ tonight. So we came out with that mindset and overall, it was a much better performance and a good win.

“We were coming in off a not just a loss, but a pretty bad loss,” MSU-N head coach Shawn Huse added. “A game like that could have shaken our confidence tonight. But instead, the guys came out and took charge of this one. They knew we didn’t play well at Westminster and they wanted to do something about that. Pretty early on, I thought we took a hold of the game, and once we got control we didn’t let it go. thought our guys played like a team who was not happy about their last game,” he continued. “And I’m really proud of them for coming back and responding the way they did.”
Vaughan and Miller led the way for the Lights, each scoring 19 points, while Vaughan went a stellar 10-for-11 from the free-throw-line and Miller made four of MSU-N’s eight trey’s. Roshawn West matched Jackson’s 12 points, as did Pearson, who had a great all-around game off the bench.

“Again, I thought our bench came to play,” Huse said. “Those guys just continue to come in ready to go and they give us a great lift.

“Tech is a very good offensive team,” he added. “And while I thought we did a really good job on defense, I also thought we played really unselfishly on offense. We moved the ball, made the extra pass and we were really efficient. I was really pleased with the all-around great effort by our guys tonight against a really good team.”

Warriors trump Lights

If Northern’s defense was top-notch on Friday night, Lewis-Clark State’s was better in a 79-65 win over the Lights Saturday night.

LCSC rebounded from a loss in Great Falls Friday night by clamping down on the Lights, holding them to 48 percent shooting, seven three’s, while the Warriors shot a staggering 60 percent from the field, even though they made just one 3-pointer.

Instead of bombing away from the outside, the Warriors exploited a height advantage over the Lights. Not only did LCSC out-rebound MSU-N 30-20, including eight second-chance shots, but time and time again, the Warriors went inside to the likes of 6-6 P.J. Bolte, 6-6 Danny Marshall and 6-6 Nick Fromm.

“Our defense didn’t hold up tonight,” Northern head coach Shawn Huse said. “That’s the bottom line. Tip your hat to LC. They played really solid defense, they hit some really tough shots right in our face and their big’s took it right to us in the paint.

“We need a gut-check right now,” he added. “We need to realize we’re going to have to work a lot harder and get some things together because the season isn’t going to get any easier from here.”

Despite the final 14-point deficit, things didn’t go wrong early for Northern. The Lights got back-to-back three’s by Roshawn West and Jesse Vaughan and were ahead 10-4 early on. Later, MSU-N went on a 7-0 run, capped by a Devin Jackson three, and the Lights were in command at 24-12.

But the warriors stuck to the game plan, which was obviously to go inside often. And they did just that. LCSC erased Northern’s lead via a 10-0 run and led 31-30 at intermission.

The game remained close for the first 10 minutes of the second half as West carried the Lights offensively, while Bolte and his LC State counterparts seemed to keep scoring at will in the lane.

But finally, LCSC’s defense seemed to wear the Lights down, and MSU-N went on a nearly seven-minute stretch without a field goal. By the time West made a layup to end the drought, the Warriors were ahead 60-52, and with Bolte and Marshall appearing nearly impossible to stop, LCSC never let the Lights get much closer.
“I thought LC hit some big shots that were contested well, or were right at the end of the shot clock,” Huse said. “And those came at times when we were trying to get some momentum back. But at the end of the day, we just didn’t respond. Our defense just didn’t hold up, and when that happens, you have to make shots on offense and we didn’t do enough of that either.”

West poured in a career-high 27 points, including three triples to lead the Lights. But only Jackson could reach double figures to join West with 13 points. Vaughan added eight points and Alfie Miller scored seven off the bench. The warriors, who improved to 19-2 overall, got 24 points from Bolte, while Marshall chipped in with 14.

The loss to LC State is magnified by the fact that the Lights now must go on the road and play the red-hot Great Falls Argos, who beat the Warriors last week, on Thursday night, then turn around and travel to Lewiston, Idaho for a re-match with the Warriors on Saturday night.

“This a tough loss,” Huse said. “It’s especially tough to take in our gym. We take pride in our home court and we just didn’t hold up tonight. We’re going to have to work very hard as a group and make sure we respond to this.”

After this week’s road trip, the Lights will finish a brutal stretch of games with a home date against UGF Feb. 1.

Lights are 5-2 in the Frontier, 17-4 overall; Next Up: At Great Falls Thursday

Lights 82, Montana Tech 68

**MT** – Daniel Simon 6-14 2-7 15, Tanner Neumann 0-2 0-0 0, Bryan Bock 3-9 2-2 9, Brandon Rydberg 6-7 0-0 16, Adam Greger 6-9 8-10 20, Travis Peevy 1-3 0-0 2, Roman Pruneda-Garza 2-6 0-0 4, Quinn Smith 0-2 2-4 2. Totals: 24-53 15-27 68.

**MSU-N** – Corbin Pearson 4-4 3-4 12, Will Perry 1-4 0-0 2, Jesse Vaughan 4-6 10-11 19, Roshawn West 6-9 0-2 12, Allan Brown 1-3 0-0 3, Devin Jackson 5-11 2-2 12, Dontae Clark 0-1 0-0 0, Savin Udeh 0-2 0-0 0, Mike LaValley 1-1 0-0 3, Pat Jensen 0-0 0-0 0, Alfie Miller 5-7 5-6 19, Anfernee Standing Rock 0-0 0-0 0. Totals: 27-48 20-25 82.

**LC State 79, Lights 65**

**LCSC** – Nick Fromm 3-5 0-0 6, Danny Marshall 7-10 0-0 14, Robert Ellis 3-6 0-0 6, Jacob Champoux 3-8 0-0 6, Donte Archie 1-3 4-6 6, Tommy Sperry 2-2 0-0 4, Joseph Moquino 4-6 0-0 9, Derrick Wofford 1-2 2-2 4, P.J. Bolte 8-11 8-8 24. Totals: 32-53 14-19 79.

**MSU-N** – Will Perry 1-3 0-0 2, Jesse Vaughan 3-6 0-0 8, Roshawn West 11-18 2-4 27, Devin Jackson 4-11 4-8 13, Allan Brown 0-1 0-0 0, Corbin Pearson 1-1 2-2 4, Dontae Clark 0-0 0-0 0, Savin Udeh 2-2 0-0 4, Mike LaValley 0-4 0-0 0, Pat Jensen 0-0 0-0 0, Alfie Miller 3-6 0-0 7, Anfernee Standing Rock 0-0 0-0 0. Totals: 25-52 8-14 65.