Lights sweep Tech, Carroll
George Ferguson
Sunday, February 10th, 2013

In the tightly-packed Frontier Conference men’s basketball race, one road win is huge. But when you can sweep on the road, it’s almost like winning three games instead of two.

And that’s exactly what the No. 18 Montana State University-Northern Lights did this weekend. The Lights beat Montana Tech 59-48 Friday night in Butte, than got past a very tough Carroll College squad, 68-61 Saturday night in Helena.

Northern’s first road sweep of the season put them alone in first place in the Frontier at 9-3. Over the weekend, the Lights also surpassed the 20-win mark for yet another year.

“It’s always big to win on the road,” Northern head coach Shawn Huse said. “Especially in this league. Everybody seems to play well at home, so I’m really proud of guys for what they did this weekend.”

Saturday night’s game was especially tough, as Northern faced a Fighting Saints’ team which is winless in the Frontier, and shockingly has produced just one win all season. However, Carroll looked anything like the last-place team for much of the game.

The Saints quickly jumped the Lights and led 10-2 early on. Northern did battle back late in the half, going an 8-0 run, which left Carroll leading 32-29 at intermission. Northern also started to shoot the ball much better in the second half, but the Saints weren’t going to go away.

The Lights took their first lead of the night at the 14-minute mark when Alfie Miller rattled home a 3-pointer, but the Saints and Lights changed leads eight times from there, and Northern was ahead by just one with 1:52 to go. From that point though, the Lights took over. MSU-N got several key stops on the defensive end, and the Lights were a perfect 8-for-8 from the free-throw-line in the final two minutes. Big plays by Corbin Pearson, and a huge bucket by Jesse Vaughan, along with calmly sank free throws by Miller and Roshawn West helped the Lights fend off a valiant Carroll effort, which included a herculean 32 points from Dennis Mikelonis.

“They (Saints) were executing really well,” Huse said. “That’s as great a one-win team as you’ll find in the country. They played great. They pushed us right to the wire. They’ve been doing that to a lot of teams lately. So I’m just really happy our guys found a way to seize control at the end.”

Miller made three trey’s, was stellar from the charity stripe and paced the Lights with 17 points. Vaughan added 12 and Pearson scored 10 off the bench. Mike LaValley also came in and hit two big three’s for the Lights, while West chipped in with nine points.

“Jesse Vaughan really showed what he could do tonight and we needed it,” Huse said. “And Alfie Miller and Roshawn West made big free throws down the stretch. But overall, this was a great all-around team win. That’s been what we’re about this season, and everybody stepped up and did something to help us get this win.”

Saturday night’s win came on the heels of an impressive victory at Montana Tech, where again, the Lights had to win the game late.
Northern played a stellar first half in Butte and was ahead 31-22 at the break against a Tech squad which was really playing its best basketball of the season. And the Diggers showed why as they closed the gap on the Lights late in the contest. Northern led by just three points with only a few minutes left in the game. But big plays by Pearson, Devin Jackson and Will Perry helped the Lights go on a late spurt and put the Diggers' away.

"It was a nice group effort again," Huse said. "It seemed like we had four or five different guys step up and make big shots down the stretch, and we were sharing the ball really well. Our defense came up big again too, because we needed some key stops near the end to get control of the game and we got them.

"We didn't shoot the ball at a very high percentage," Huse added. "But I think our defense was playing well enough that we didn't let them (Orediggers) get going either. So I'm really proud of the defensive effort our guys gave tonight."

Pearson, who's been having a huge impact for the Lights the last month, led the way with 12 points and seven rebounds, while Jackson scored 11 and took over the game late. Allan Brown gave the Lights a solid 10 points, while West scored nine.

"Tech had been playing really well coming in," Huse said. "And they are a very dangerous team. So for us to get out of there with a win was big. I'm just really proud of our effort and our focus."

The two wins over the weekend meant Northern sweeps the Diggers' and Saints this season. The Lights (21-5) also have a half game lead on Lewis-Clark State heading into their final two home games of the regular season. Northern hosts UM-Western on Thursday night and nationally-ranked Westminster on Saturday night.

**Lights 59, Montana Tech 48**

**MSU-N** — Will Perry 3-5 0-1 6, Jesse Vaughn 1-7 0-0 3, Roshawn West 2-3 4-7 9, Devin Jackson 3-10 5-8 11, Alan Brown 4-6 0-0 10, Corbin Pearson 4-8 4-5 12, Mike LaValley 1-3 0-0 3, Alfie Miller 1-2 2-2 5. TOTALS: 19-44 15-23 59

**MT** — Daniel Simon 4-9 1-4 9, Brandon Rydberg 0-0 0-0 0, Adam Greger 7-11 3-5 17, Bryan Bock 4-14 0-0 10, Roman Pruneda-Garza 1-4 2-2 4, Travis Peevey 0-1 0-0 0, Quinn Smith 3-6 0-0 6, Nathan Smith 0-1 0-0 0, Paul Engstrom 0-0 2-2 2, Reid Baerlocher 0-0 0-0 0. TOTALS: 19-46 8-13 48.

Halftime score: Northern 31-22; 3-point field goals: MSUN 6-18 (Brown 2-3, West 1-1, Miller 1-2, LaValley 1-3, Vaughn 1-5); Tech 2-10 (Bock 2-6); Rebounds: MSUN 33 (Pearson 7), Tech 26 (Simon 6, Greger 6); Total fouls: MSUN 15, Tech 20; Fouled Out: Simon, Rydberg.

**Lights 68, Carroll 61**

**MSU-N** — Will Perry 2-2 0-0 4, Jesse Vaughan 6-10 0-0 12, Roshawn West 2-3 3-4 9, Devin Jackson 4-9 0-0 8, Alan Brown 1-4 0-0 2, Corbin Pearson 2-2 6-6 10, Savion Udeh 0-0 0-0 0, Mike LaValley 2-5 0-0 6, Alfie Miller 5-8 4-4 17. Team totals 25-48 13-14 68.

**CC** — Jake Hollifield 0-2 0-0 0, Riley King 3-5 0-0 6, Dennis Mikelonis 14-19 2-4 32, Chris McGrath 2-3 1-2 6, Nick Jones 3-8 8-10 15, Noah Kone-Nelson 0-0 0-0 0, Brett Ball 1-3 0-0 2, Everett Johnston 0-0 0-0 0, Nick Williams 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 23-40 11-16 61.