Lights chase Frontier title at Rocky Mountain, DSU
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The Montana State University-Northern men’s basketball has known championships the last two seasons. The Lights have shared the last two Frontier Conference regular season titles, and have won the last two postseason crowns.

So it’s only fitting that entering the final week of the regular season, the Lights are in championship hunt mode yet again.

The No. 13 Lights (10-4, 22-6) head to Rocky Mountain College tonight in Billings, before closing out the regular season Saturday night at Dickinson State. Northern is one game behind Lewis-Clark State for first in the Frontier standings, while the Lights hold a one-game lead on UM-Western for second. So plenty of postseason drama hangs in the balance this weekend, not only for Northern, but for much of the Frontier Conference, as many teams are still fighting for the six coveted playoff berths.

But all Northern can do is try and take care of business and the chips will fall where they may. Tonight’s game at RMC (7-7, 16-12) will be a barn burner considering the Lights thumped the Battlin’ Bears 71-59 last month in Havre, and Rocky is desperately trying to hold on to a playoff spot.

The Bears will challenge the Lights with their size. Joel Barndt (6-8) is Rocky’s catalyst, averaging 15 points and eight rebounds, while 6-6 Jeramy Nicholas leads RMC in scoring at 16 points per outing. RMC also gets double-figure scoring from Don Parham and Malachi Roberts, while Northern, which is coming off an 85-81 win over Westminster last Saturday, will counter with Devin Jackson, who averages 15 points per night, and the inside play of Jesse Vaughan, Will Perry and Corbin Pearson, which will be crucial against the taller Bears.

“Rocky has shown all year that they are more than capable of beating anybody in the country on any given night,” MSU-N head coach Shawn Huse said. “We will need to have a good game defensively if we expect to have success at their place. I suppose you could say it all starts with their posts and their ability to score inside, but that definitely does not mean you can ignore their guards. They have the quickness and shooting on the perimeter to put up big numbers quickly.”

Saturday night won’t get any easier on the road. Dickinson State (3-9, 10-18) is out of playoff contention, but the Blue Hawks won’t roll over for MSU-N either. Northern beat the Blue Hawks 72-65 last month in Havre, but DSU has plenty of talent, especially in the post with Johnie Sanders, who averages 11 points per game, and Jarek Hansen, who adds 10 points and seven boards per outing.

“Dickinson State plays extremely hard and possesses great shooting ability,” Huse said. “They are very scrappy and do a great job on the offensive boards. Along with being efficient and executing well on offense, we will need to defend the three-point-line, while coming up with long rebounds.”
And if Northern is successful on the road, the Lights will likely end up with the No. 2 seed and two home games in the playoffs. Northern can still win the league title, but the Lights two wins and two LCSC losses for that to happen as the Warriors hold the tiebreaker over the Lights.

Tonight’s game against RMC in Billings tips off at 7:30. Saturday’s game at Dickinson State also tips off at 7:30 p.m. Both games can be viewed online at www.msun.edu/athletics.