There’s something about the Frontier Conference playoffs, the Armory Gymnasium and the Great Falls Argos which seems to bring out the best in the Montana State University-Northern Lights.

Northern trampled the Argos in the 2012 semifinals on its way to a Frontier title. And even though the Lights came into their first-round playoff game with the Argos shooting an awful 21 percent from the floor in its last two games, playing UGF always seems to cure whatever has been ailing the Lights.

And it did Wednesday night as the No. 20 Lights blitzed the Argos 74-52 at a packed Armory Gymnasium, in a game which was really never that close. MSU-N hit 12-of-24 three’s after making just 11 in its last two road games last weekend, and the Lights (23-8) advanced to the Frontier semifinals for the ninth straight season. MSU-N will face second-seeded UM-Western Saturday night in Dillon.

"I think we just came together as a unit,” junior Roshawn West, who buried four of Northern’s 12 trey’s said. “We pushed each other hard all week to get better. We talked things out because we hadn’t been playing well the last couple of games. And we played with a chip on our shoulder tonight. Our team is very close, on and off the court, and we knew we had to come in tonight and have each other’s backs. We had to play hard and play for each other, and we did that.”

Northern also pushed the Argos hard right from the start. MSU-N ripped off eight unanswered points in the first 2:14 as will Perry collected two steals and the Lights set a tone defensively. Then the three-ball’s started to fall. First Devin Jackson dropped one in and then West made his first of the night, and the Lights were out to a quick 14-4 lead. Alfie Miller also sank a triple early and though the Lights went on a six-minute scoring drought midway through the first half, they closed with two more trey’s from Miller, one more from West and a final nail from Jesse Vaughan as the halftime buzzer sounded.

In all, the Lights shot 54 percent and hit eight first-half bombs, building a 37-19 lead in the process.

“Tonight, we looked more like the Northern team we’ve been for most, if not all of the season,” MSU-N head coach Shawn Huse said. “Honestly, we know, with the exception of the win over Westminster, we haven’t played our best basketball the last four games. But tonight we got rolling again. We moved the ball well, we found the open man, and the shots fell for us. I was really pleased with how we started and how we finished. I really liked our defensive intensity tonight too. So credit to our guys for coming in very well prepared and very focused.”

Northern never let of the gas either.
Mike LaValley belted a pair of three’s in the second half, while Miller hit another as part of a 12-0 run which gave the Lights a 54-24 lead with 13:41 still to play. UGF never responded and the Lights cruised to the finish line and into the semifinals. Down the stretch, Huse was able to empty his bench, see reserve Pat Jensen make some nice plays and get Jackson, playing in what might have been his final home game, a well-deserved standing ovation.

“Everybody did something tonight to chip in,” Huse said. “And when we're at our best, that’s the way we do it. We had guys knock down big shots, we had guys make some hustle plays, we got after it on defense and we got some offensive rebounds and some second-chance shots tonight. I thought we just played very hard and I was really proud of our effort and our focus.”

West paced a balanced MSU-N attack with four three’s and 14 points. Miller added four bombs and 12 points, while Vaughan had 11 points and seven rebounds, and Perry added a solid 11 points and five boards. UGF, which ended its season at 17-14, and with three losses to the Lights, got 16 points from James Holmes and 13 by T.J. Harris. But Northern’s stellar defense limited star scorer Marcel Towns to just six points and the Argos to just 35 percent shooting from the floor and 21 percent from three.

“We came out with a chip on our shoulder defensively,” West said. “We felt like we had been playing soft the last couple of games, and we knew we had to pick up the defensive intensity tonight. We came out and played hard and we knew if we were sound defensively, the offense would be alright.

“So I’m very, very proud of my team tonight,” he continued. “These are great guys and great teammates and it feels really good to get this win. At the same time though, we have to have a short memory, put this one behind us and get ready to go get a win down at Western.

“If this was our last home game for this year (The Lights could host Rocky Mountain College in the championship game if both win Saturday night),” Huse said. “It was a great one. The crowd was great, I’m really proud of the way we played and it was a great way to go out.

“And playing this well, getting back on track,” he added. “Should give us a good confidence boost going down to Western. This was just a great night for us.”

Saturday night’s Frontier semifinal game between the Lights and Bulldogs will tip off at 7 p.m. in Dillon. The winner will either travel to Lewis-Clark State or host Rocky in the championship game Tuesday night. RMC shocked Westminster in Wednesday night’s other playoff game.

---

**Lights are now 23-8; Next Up: at No. 17 UM-Western Saturday night**

**Lights 74, Great Falls 52**

**UGF** — T.J. Harris 4-12 2-2 13, Miheul Bocachica 0-1 0-0 0, James Holmes 5-7 6-6 16, Naren Maynerd 1-6 1-3 3, Marcel Towns 2-8 2-3 6, Mike Sangrey Jr. 0-0 1-2 1, Reid Tramelli 0-0 1-2 1, David Ubadigo 0-3 0-0 0, Maleek Singleton 2-4 3-5 7. Totals: 16-45 17-25 52.
**MSU-N** — Will Perry 5-5 0-0 10, Jesse Vaughan 5-8 0-0 11, Roshawn West 5-12 0-0 14, Devin Jackson 3-6 2-4 9, Alan Brown 1-2 0-0 2, Corbin Pearson 1-7 2-2 4, Dontae Clark 0-0 0-0 0, Savion Udeh 0-1 0-0 0, Mike LaValley 2-4 0-0 6, Pat Jensen 2-2 0-0 4, Alfie Miller 4-7 0-0 12, Anfernee Standing Rock 0-1 0-0 0. Totals: 29-56 4-7 74.