Lights bring down the Thunder
Northern men breeze to a season-opening win over Concordia
By George Ferguson
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It took 10 minutes or so, but once the Montana State University-Northern men’s basketball team found a little rhythm, the Lights were off and running.

Northern opened its 2013-14 season with a 59-37 victory over Concordia University of Alberta Sunday afternoon at the Armory Gymnasium. And though veteran head coach Shawn Huse saw plenty of room for improvement, he was excited about his team’s season-opening, albeit very early win.

“Our execution wasn’t great,” Huse said. “But that was to be expected. We are still working out the kinks so to speak. We are still working out playing together on the floor. But I really liked our effort. I thought we made a lot of nice hustle plays today, and most of them led to good things for us. I also liked the fact that we got everybody a lot of game experience today. We got a lot of film from this game and we can go look at it and see where we need to get better. So it was a really constructive start.”

As with most early-season games, both the Lights and Thunder got off to a sluggish beginning Sunday afternoon. Corbin Pearson scored Northern’s first point of the season on a free throw and Jesse Vaughan’s layup at the 18:03 mark was MSU-N’s first field goal of the new year. Later, 3-pointers by Pat Jensen and Mike LaValley capped a quick 8-0 run, which put the Lights ahead 15-5 10 minutes into the contest.

But in the final 10 minutes of the first half, Northern began to look like the Lights of old. Allan Brown buried a triple at the 5:44 mark, and Alfie Miller followed with a three of his own. On the next MSU-N possession, Brown knocked in another bomb as part of what would eventually be a 15-1 run by the Lights.

On the defensive side of the ball, Northern was stifling in the final 10 minutes of the first frame. Concordia struggled to even get shots off, and the Thunder went the last eight minutes of the half without a field goal. Miller, who buried three trey’s on the day, finished the half with five more points and the Lights led 38-12 at the break.

“Individually, I thought there were some key plays,” Huse said. “Our shooters looked a little more comfortable towards the end of the first half, and I think defensively, our effort and intensity was very good for the first game of the season.”

Concordia did out-score Northern in the second half, but the Lights had built much too big a lead for the Thunder to ever really threaten. And Northern wound up playing all 12 players it suited up, with almost everybody garnering equal minutes.

“That’s what was good about this game,” Huse said. “We got a lot of good film to look at. And we were able to work on things against somebody else, instead of just working on them in practice. So now we can go forward and work on things that need improving. Everybody has things they can improve on from this game.”
Ten different Lights got into the scoring column Sunday, with Miller leading the way with 11 points. In his Northern debut, Gabe Finley scored eight points and grabbed a team-high eight rebounds. Pearson added nine points, including a thunderous, two-handed dunk in the second half. The Lights went 9-of-33 from beyond the arc, with LaValley and Brown each knocking down two trey’s, while Anfernee Standing Rock had one as well.

Defensively, the Lights held the Thunder, who also lost at Carroll College and Great Falls this past week, to just 25 percent shooting for the game. MSU-N also forced the Thunder into 22 turnovers and the Lights won the battle of the boards 46-39. Concordia’s David Shants did lead all scorers with 13 points.

Now off to a 1-0 start, the Lights will turn their attention to a doubleheader with the University of Regina Friday-Saturday in Havre. Regina will present a bigger challenge as the Cougars are a CIS powerhouse (Canada’s top level of college basketball).

But all-in-all, Huse was pleased with the start, and is looking forward to his team getting better each week.

“We’ll go back to work, and learn from this game,” Huse said. “It’s a solid start. I think we’ll take a lot away from this because we can now see where we need to improve.”

**Lights are 1-0; Next Up: vs Regina Friday and Saturday**

**Lights 59, Concordia 37**

**CU** – David Shants 5-13 3-4 13, Ben Grimsrud 1-4 1-2 3, Euriah Pemberton 2-8 0-0 4, Dallas Wright 0-9 4-4 4, Nikkio Gruce 1-5 0-1 2, Liban Abdi Aziz 1-5 1-2 3, Brett Casey 2-4 1-1 5, Chris Stoltz 0-0 3-8 3. Totals: 12-49 13-21 37.

**MSU-N** – Corbin Pearson 4-5 1-2 9, Jesse Vaughan 1-3 2-2 4, Roshawn West 0-6 0-0 0, Allan Brown 2-3 0-0 6, Alfie Miller 3-6 2-2 11, Nicholas Blount 0-5 0-0 0, Gabe Finley 4-10 0-1 8, Anfernee Standing Rock 1-5 0-0 3, Mike LaValley 2-6 0-0 6, Will Perry 1-2 2-4 4, Pat Jensen 2-3 0-0 5, Xavier Shaw 1-10 1-4 3. Totals: 21-64 8-15 59.

Halftime: MSU-N 38-12. 3-pointers: CU 0-0, MSU-N 9-33 (Brown 2, Miller 3, Standing Rock 1, LaValley 2, Jensen 1); Rebounds: CU 39 (Pemberton 5), MSU-N 46 (Finley 8); Fouls: CU 15, MSU-N 19. Fouled Out: None.