Lights slow down Pronghorns
Northern blows out Lethbridge in the Armory Gymnasium
By George Ferguson
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Last month, the Montana State University-Northern men’s basketball team had an all-out battle with the Lethbridge Pronghorns north of the border … a game the Lights escaped from with a two-point victory.

Thursday night, the rematch was no contest, and while the Pronghorns were without several key players, it would have made little difference as the No. 24 Lights blitzed Lethbridge 87-61 in the Armory Gymnasium.

It may have been ice cold outside, but was Northern was red-hot from the start Thursday night. The Lights buried 12 3-pointers and shot a blistering 59 percent from the floor against the Horns, who are expected to compete for a CIS Canada West conference championship this winter. MSU-N also clamped down on the defensive end, holding the high-scoring Pronghorns to just 37 percent shooting and three made 3-pointers.

“I’m very happy with our performance,” Northern head coach Shawn Huse said. “They (Pronghorns) were missing a couple of their key guys, but I thought our guys went out and did what they needed to do. I thought we shot the ball really well, we got after it defensively, and we had a good night on the boards. I thought we played a pretty complete game against a very good team, a team that is putting together a really good season up in Canada. So I’m really happy with our guys.”

The short-handed Pronghorns did hang tough for stretches of the first half, but Northern’s shooting was too much for Lethbridge to keep pace. The Lights actually trailed 12-11, the only time they were behind the entire game, but from there, they caught fire. Alfie Miller, who poured in a game-high 19 points, hit his second triple of the first half, and MSU-N followed that with a steal and the first of four threes by junior guard Nicholas Blount. The back-to-back treys sparked what would eventually become a 14-0 run, capped off by two straight buckets from reserve forward Gabe Finley.

The Northern onslaught kept going, too. MSU-N harassed the Pronghorns defensively, and when Allan Brown knocked down the Lights’ fifth three of the half, MSU-N was ahead 32-15, and eventually took a 42-23 lead into halftime.

“I really liked our effort and intensity in the first half,” Huse said. “When you play as many intense and emotional games as we have recently, this kind of game can be pretty difficult. Our guys knew they (Horns) were missing some of their key players, but I was really proud of them for remaining focused on the task at hand.
"I thought our guys were really focused tonight," he added. "They played with a lot of energy and hustle, and I think that was a big reason why we were able to build a nice lead there and then play with it in the second half."

The Lights, including their bench, did play well with a big second-half lead. The Pronghorns did get within 12 points early in the second frame, but midway through, Miller buried three more triples and went on an 11-3 run by himself, effectively putting the Pronghorns away for good.

While Miller and Blount combined for nine of MSU-N’s threes and Blount totaled 12 points, Northern got solid efforts all around. Corbin Pearson scored 11 points and pulled down a team-high seven rebounds, while Finley gave the Lights 14 points off the bench and Jesse Vaughan chipped in with eight points and four boards. In all, MSU-N’s bench scored 39 points and helped the Lights go a sparkling 17-of-21 from the free-throw-line. The Horns (7-5) were led by Logan Reiter’s 16 points.

"I really liked the spark our bench gave us tonight," Huse said. "Mike LaValley, Gabe Finley, Nicholas Blount, those guys gave us a nice lift, actually all our guys who came in did a great job tonight. And that was nice to see because we’re going to need that spark from our bench as we get into conference play."

Thursday night’s win pushed MSU-N to 9-2 on the season, and started off a big weekend of games for the Lights, who will road trip to Camrose, Alberta, for games against Augustana of Alberta tonight and Saturday afternoon. The road trip wraps up play for Northern until after the holiday break, so Huse was really excited to be headed toward the break with some positive momentum, especially following up last Saturday’s dramatic win over Carroll College.

"Tonight was more good experience for us," Huse said. "That Lethbridge team has a lot of firepower. They were missing a few guys, but they still had some firepower out on the floor tonight, and I thought we played really well against a very good team. These types of games will continue to get us ready for conference play."

**Lights are 9-2 overall, 1-0 in the Frontier; Next Up: at Augustana Tonight-Saturday**

**Lights 87, Lethbridge 61**

**UL** – Jason Nysten 3-4 0-0 6, Jared Baker 3-15 1-6 8, Logan Reiter 4-11 8-8 16, Morgan Duce 4-13 0-0 9, Alex Fletcher 3-6 4-4 11, Dallon Martin 1-2 0-0 2, Spencer Lambert 1-1 2-2 4, Trey Wilson 2-5 0-1 5. Totals: 21-56 16-22 61.

**MSU-N** – Corbin Pearson 4-6 3-3 11, Jesse Vaughan 2-4 4-4 8, Roshawn West 3-3 0-0 7, Allan Brown 1-3 0-0 3, Alfie Miller 7-12 0-0 19, Nicholas Blount 4-7 0-0 12, Gabe Finley 6-7 2-3 14, Anfernee Standing Rock 1-2 0-0 2, Mike LaValley 1-4 2-2 5, Pat Jensen 0-1 2-3 2, Xavier Shaw 0-0 4-6 4. Totals: 29-49 17-21 87.

Halftime: Northern 42-23. 3-pointers: MSU-N 12-25 (West 1, Brown 1, Miller 5, Blount 4, LaValley 1), UL 3-14 (Baker 1, Duce 1, Fletcher 1); Rebounds: MSU-N 33 (Pearson 7), UL 23 (Baker 8); Fouls: MSU-N 20, UL 21; Fouled out: Nysten.

Northern's Allan Brown makes a pass during Thursday night's basketball game against Lethbridge in Havre.