Lights sweep Eagles at home
MSU-N men win in a blowout and in a dramatic comeback in two games against NW Indian College
By George Ferguson
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When you beat a team by 35 points, when you drain 16 3-pointers and are never threatened, and you’re playing the same club the next day, you don’t expect to have to make a layup and a free throw in the final seconds to win.

Yet that’s exactly what happened to the Montana State University-Northern Lights Saturday afternoon at the Armory Gymnasium.

Roshawn West’s driving layup and subsequent free throw lifted the No. 24 Lights to a dramatic come-from-behind victory, 69-68 over the Northwest Indian College Eagles. The hard-fought victory, in which NWIC led for more than 30 total minutes, came less than 24 hours after the Lights crushed the Eagles 91-56.

“Any time you play as poorly as we did today, shoot the ball as poorly as we did today, and defend as poorly as we did today, and still find a way to win, you have to be thankful,” Northern head coach Shawn Huse said. “So I’m very, very proud of our guys. On Friday night, we shot the ball about as well as we ever have, and today, it was the exact opposite of that. We couldn’t make anything, we couldn’t get any momentum, and we didn’t even really make up for it on defense. But still, our guys hung in there, and they found a way to get it done. So I’m really proud of them for that.”

Northern did indeed have to hang in against an Eagles club that was carried by a herculean effort from Joshua Nelson. The 6-5 power forward poured in an incredible 37 points on 13-of-22 shooting, while also grabbing 10 rebounds as Northern seemingly had no answer for him on either end of the floor.

“He’s a great player, and he had a great game,” Huse said. “He’s a guy who gave Montana State fits in Bozeman last year. I think he’s a guy who would do that to any team in our league. He was everywhere for them to do, and he was very difficult to get a handle on.”

Nelson was also a sparkling 11-for-13 from the free-throw-line, but one of his missed came with just 15 seconds left, and it opened the door for Northern to steal a victory. In a back-and-forth final five minutes, the Eagles took the lead at 64-62 with 1:15 left, but Allan Brown’s lone 3-pointer gave Northern a 65-64 lead with :49 to go. However, Nelson answered with a bucket to put the Eagles back up by one, and when Jesse Vaughan’s attempt at a go-ahead bucket came up short, Nelson corralled the rebound and had a chance to put his team up three with :15 left.

However, after a Northern timeout, he missed the second of his charity shots, and Vaughan pulled down the rebound, passed to a streaking West who went all the way to the basket, making a layup with his left hand.
and drawing contact as well. West calmly sank the free throw to put the Lights up one, and Northern’s
defense never gave the Eagles, in particular Nelson, a clean look at a game-winning shot.

“Credit coach L.V. (Lavon Myers) for suggesting we call timeout after he took his first free throw,” Huse
said. “That maybe contributed to that miss, and it also gave us a chance to set something up. Our thought
was, there was enough time to go down and go for a bucket, and maybe get fouled, but even if we didn’t,
we had enough time to foul again, and take another possession.

“And it all worked out,” he added. “Ro (West) went to the basket really aggressively and he drew some
contact. That was a really big play by Ro. I thought Allan’s three earlier was huge too. We didn’t shoot it
well, and he was having an off weekend, but that was a huge shot, and I don’t know if we would have
pulled this off without that shot, so credit to him with staying with it and knocking down a big one when we
really needed it.”

The Lights needed a multitude of big shots to come back against the Eagles Saturday. Northern shot a
dismal 33 percent, including going just 2-of-15 in the first half, while Nelson scored 20 points in the first 20
minutes, and staked the Eagles to a surprising 37-28 halftime lead. Northwest dominated the first half,
shooting 65 percent from the floor and turning the Lights over eight times.

However, MSU-N started to creep out of its funk with a 9-2 run to start the second frame. West nailed his
only three of the game, while Alfie Miller’s third three of the outing gave MSU-N its first lead since it led 2-0
with 12:21 to play. And Pat Jensen followed Miller’s triple with one of his own, and it looked like the Lights
were finally going to take over, leading 49-45 with 11:40 left in the contest.

But the Eagles didn’t go away. Nelson kept them in it by scoring eight more points in a four-minute stretch,
and back-to-back buckets to even things up with 4:49 to play, and after Miller had just hit another bomb
which put the Lights up by four. Miller then made a fade-away jumper with 4:10 to go to put the Lights
ahead 61-58, but a big shot by Mike Schjang Jr., who had 16 points, and another layin by Nelson gave
NWIC a 62-61 edge with 3:04 to play, setting up the dramatic finish.

“All the credit in the world to Northwest,” Huse said. “They came back today and played so well. They never
played like a team that got blown out the night before. That’s a very talented group, and we knew that
coming in. They play well together, they’re not deep, but they have good personnel, and they play really
well together. And they did today. That was a very impressive for them to come back the way they did
today against us.”

And for 35 minutes Saturday, the Lights were less than impressive, and they were short-handed as well.
Northern was without starter Corbin Pearson, as well as top reserve Nicholas Blount. Then, backup forward
Damian Robinson, who began his season Friday, went down with an ankle injury early in the contest, and
all of a sudden, the Lights found themselves in a tough spot.

“We had to have guys play heavy, heavy minutes today,” Huse said. “So I’m proud of all of them for
hanging in there. Today was by no means easy. Nothing came easy for us on either end. And after last
night, I felt like we just didn’t fully have our legs. But they hung in there, they found a way, and I’m proud
of them for really gutting one out.”

Miller paced the Lights with four trey’s and 16 points, while West had 15, including the game-winning 3-
point play. Jensen scored 11 points and grabbed five boards, while Jesse Vaughan scored eight and also
pulled down five rebounds.

And while Saturday was as difficult a game as the Lights have had in quite some time, Friday night’s return
to the hardwood after a 20-day break was anything but.

The Lights blitzed the Eagles to the tune of 10 first-half 3-pointers and led 52-23 in a game that was never
close, and was marred by a pair of technical fouls by Eagle players.

Miller showed little signs of rust, opening the game with the first of his four three’s, while Jensen made two
bombs in the first 20 minutes, as did West and Mike LaValley.

“I was really surprised at how well we shot the ball,” Huse said, "and how well we executed our offense. It
felt like we played better in that first half than we had been playing before the break.
“When you’re off for 20 days, you just don’t know what to expect,” he continued. “But we came out and shot it as well as we have, maybe ever, and I thought we were just as good on the defensive end. I thought our energy was great, we were hustling for the 50-50 balls, and a lot of different guys were really stepping up and making plays. So it was nice to see us play that well, after having such a long layoff. It speaks to how well our guys stay focused, and I’m very proud of them for that.”

In all, the Lights went 16-for-31 from beyond the arc Friday night. MSU-N shot a stellar 57 percent from the field and saw five players reach double figures, led by Miller’s 21 points on 7-of-12 shooting. West and Finley added 15 points each, while Jensen scored a career-high 14. Vaughan also chipped in with 11 points and seven boards in the convincing win. Nelson did a have a big night for NWIC, scoring 21 points and grabbing 10 rebounds for the first of what was two double-doubles in the Armory.

And after one blowout, and one nailbiter, the Lights’ non-conference schedule is now history. Northern takes stellar 13-2 record into Thursday night’s Frontier opener at Rocky Mountain College, and Saturday’s win preserved what is now a seven-game winning streak.

“We certainly didn’t play the way we would have liked today, especially after playing so well on Friday night,” Huse said. “But I think it will be a good experience for us. Kind of a wakeup call. And we were still able to find a way to win, so we feel really good about that, and we feel good about where we’re at right now.”

Northern travels to 10th-ranked RMC Thursday night, and the Lights wrap up their first conference road trip Saturday night at Dickinson State. MSU-N returns home to host UM-Western Jan. 9.

**Lights are 13-2 overall, 1-0 in the Frontier; Next up: At RMC Thursday**

**Lights 91, NW Indian 56**

**NWIC** – Drake Wynn 0-0 0-0 0, Josh Nelson 8-17 5-7 21, Randy Evans 3-10 0-1 6, Mike Schajang Jr. 5-12 2-2 13, Robert Senseimer 4-7 3-4 11, Sonny Sylvester 2-4 0-0 5. Totals: 22-53 10-14 51.

**MSU-N** – Jesse Vaughan 3-6 3-4 11, Pat Jensen 6-10 0-0 14, Roshawn West 5-8 1-2 15, Allan Brown 1-2 0-0 2, Alfie Miller 7-12 3-4 21, Gabe Finley 7-7 0-2 15, Anfernee Standing Rock 1-6 0-0 3, Mike LaValley 2-4 0-0 6, Damian Robinson 2-2 0-0 4, Xavier Shaw 0-2 0-0 0. Totals: 34-59 7-12 91.


**Lights 69, NW Indian 68**

**NWIC** – Drake Wynn 0-0 0-0 0, Josh Nelson 13-22 11-13 37, Mike Schajang Jr. 5-14 5-6 16, Randy Evans 4-8 4-7 12, Sonny Sylvester 1-2 0-0 3. Totals: 23-48 20-26 68.

**MSU-N** – Jesse Vaughan 3-8 2-2 8, Pat Jensen 5-8 0-0 11, Roshawn West 5-10 4-6 15, Allan Brown 2-4 1-3 6, Alfie Miller 6-16 0-0 16, Gabe Finley 3-7 0-0 6, Mike LaValley 1-5 0-0 2, Damian Robinson 1-1 0-0 2, Xavier Shaw 1-1 1-2 3. Totals: 27-60 8-13 69.