Lights grounds Hawks on a buzzer beater
Northern comes back to beat DSU on a last-second Alfie Miller shot in overtime
By George Ferguson
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Less than two weeks ago, the Montana State University-Northern men’s basketball team needed a last-second, 3-point play by senior Roshawn West to beat Northwest Indian College in the Armory Gymnasium. As it turned out, the Lights would need more last-second heroics to avoid a Frontier Conference road sweep.

Alfie Miller’s last-second shot Saturday afternoon as the buzzer sounded in overtime lifted the No. 16 Lights to a dramatic 71-69 win over the Dickinson State Blue Hawks Saturday afternoon in Dickinson, N.D. The come-from-behind win came on the heels of Thursday night’s loss at Rocky Mountain College, and it gave the Lights a much-needed road split at the start of league play.

“I can’t say enough about how proud I am of our guys,” Northern head coach Shawn Huse said. “From the time we got on the bus in Billings, to the end of the Dickinson game, I’ve never seen a more focused and determined group. They really wanted this win for themselves and for each other. They really willed themselves to this one, and it was a very emotional game for sure. I’m just really proud of this group right now, for the way they approached this game, and for how hard they fought till the end.”

Northern had to indeed fight hard. The Lights quickly fell behind the Blue Hawks, who thumped the University of Great Falls Thursday night, 12-5, and again, things just weren’t seeming to go the Lights’ way. Meanwhile, DSU shot 50 percent from the floor and made five 3-pointers in the first half to stake itself to a 32-24 lead at intermission.

The Blue Hawks kept up the pace for much of the second half, too, and led 47-39 with under 10 minutes remaining in the game. But the Lights finally found some rhythm, and they ripped off a 7-0 run to get back into the contest. From there, the game was a seesaw affair until Miller drained a three which gave the Lights their first lead since it was 2-0. However, DSU continued to fight, and the teams battled their way to a 64-64 tie at the end of regulation.

“It seemed like, for much of the game, we just couldn’t get established,” Huse said. “It was partially our own fault, we once again didn’t make shots. But it had more to do with how well Dickinson played. They made shots, they played great defense and they just really played a great game. And we just didn’t seem to have an answer for them for much of the game.

“But I felt like, once we finally got over that hump, we had the momentum,” he added. “It took a while, and even though the game still went into overtime, I just felt like we had gained some control finally, and it was our game to win.”

Once into the extra frame, the Lights and Blue Hawks traded baskets, and the game was coming down to the wire. Tied at 69-69, the Lights had a possession with just 39 seconds left in the period. Northern ran its offense, and Jesse Vaughan got a decent look at a possible game-winner, but it rimmed off. However,
hustle plays by Corbin Pearson and Allan Brown kept the ball alive and eventually, Miller scooped it up and sank a shot as the buzzer sounded, giving the Lights an improbable win.

“As for the last play in overtime,” Huse said. “We wanted to run that shot clock down and give them as little time as possible because there was a four-second difference on the shot clock and game clock. From there, it was just a great effort by our guys to get hands on the ball after the miss. Our guys really reacted to that, and eventually, it came to Alfie and he made the bucket. It was just a great all-around effort by our guys to not quit on a loose ball.”

It was a great all-around effort by the entire Lights’ roster for not quitting on a game which was tough from start to finish. Miller finished with 11 points and three 3-pointers, while Pearson scored a team-high 18 points and grabbed eight rebounds. Will Perry, back from missing two months with a knee injury, chipped in with 10 points, while Gabe Finley had a second straight big game off the bench, scoring 13 points and playing stellar defense down the stretch.

Dickinson, which has shown that it will be a team to be reckoned with this season, got a game-high 23 points from Tevin Russell, but the MSU-N defense really clamped down on the Blue Hawks in the final 25 minutes, holding DSU to just one triple after halftime.

The win pushed Northern to 2-1 in Frontier play, and 14-3 overall. It should also give the Lights some much-needed momentum heading into a huge home stand. Northern hosts first-place UM-Western on Thursday night, then welcomes in Frontier stalwart Westminster College Saturday night.

“No question this was a big one, they all are in this league, but to come back and find a way to win this game, it’s huge,” Huse said. “You have to give Dickinson a ton of credit. They are playing really well, and if they continue to play that way, they are going to make a lot of noise in the Frontier Conference this year. So to get that win, in their gym, with them playing that well, it’s huge for us.

“Our guys really gutted that one out,” he continued. “They fought all the way, and I couldn't be more proud of them. It was a great win for this team.”

*Lights are 2-1 in Frontier; 14-3 overall; Next Up: Vs Western Thursday*

**Lights 71, Dickinson St. 69, OT**

**MSU-N** – Roshawn West 1-3 0-0 2, Nicholas Blount 1-2 0-0 3, Allan Brown 3-6 0-0 7, Corbin Pearson 7-11 4-5 18, Alfie Miller 4-12 0-0 11, Gabe Finley 5-12 2-2 13, Mike LaValley 0-1 0-0 0, Will Perry 5-5 0-0 10, Jesse Vaughan 3-6 0-0 7. Totals: 29-58 6-7 71.

**DSU** – Ty Ackelson 1-7 2-4 5, Juston Goodwin 0-0 0-0 0, Robbie Morey 1-1 0-3 3, DeSean Atkins 2-7 5-6 10, Brock Boos 3-7 0-0 10, Tevin Russell 10-14 2-2 23, Jacob Volk 0-3 1-2 1, Mackenson Odeneir 9-12 1-4 19. Totals: 26-51 11-21 69.

Halftime: Dickinson St. 32-24. 3-pointers: MSU-N 7-19 (Blount 1, Brown 1, Miller 3, Finley 1, Vaughan 1), DSU 9-12 (Ackelson 1, Morey 1, Atkins 1, Boos 2, Russell 1); Rebounds: MSU-N 23 (Pearson 8), DSU 29 (Ackelson 8). Fouls: MSU-N 16, DSU 10. Fouled out: None.