Lights down Diggers' in double OT thriller
By George Ferguson
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The Montana State University-Northern men’s basketball team has been on a rollercoaster ride since Frontier Conference play began. And this weekend’s road swing through Butte and Helena was more of the same.

Northern senior Roshawn West lifted the Lights to a dramatic, 83-82 double-overtime win over Montana Tech Friday night in Butte, but the momentum was halted just 24 hours later when the Carroll College Fighting Saints upset the Lights 56-47 Saturday night in Helena.

And while a split on the road is never a bad thing in the Frontier, Northern head coach Shawn Huse felt like his team let one get away against the Saints.

"It was discouraging that we did everything right against Carroll except make shots," Huse said. "Coming off such an emotional win at Tech, it was tough to watch us not play like we’re capable of the next night."

"But we did win a big game in Butte," he added. "And It was a real gutty performance by our guys. So I’m extremely proud of them for that."

Friday night’s victory was Northern’s second in double OT in three weeks, and the Lights had to make big shot after big shot in order to get by the high-scoring Orediggers.

In a back-and-forth first half, the Lights edged in front 30-28 at intermission. From there, it was a series of momentum swings, where neither team was able to separate. The game was tied at 57-57 with just over five minutes to play, but Corbin Pearson gave the Lights a 60-57 lead on a big 3-pointer. Tech didn’t back down and twice had a two-point lead inside of a minute left in regulation, but Pearson made two free throws with six seconds left to send the game into overtime, tied at 67-67.

In the first extra session, Tech led by as many as four points, but a Northern trey and two made free throws, followed by a last-second missed heave by Tech’s Marcus Payne, sent the game to a second OT. In the second extra session, Tech again led early 78-74, but saw a Northern rally after Bryan Bock hit a transition bank shot with nine seconds left to put the Orediggers up 82-81. After a series of timeouts, Northern had the ball at half court with :04 left, and that’s when West made a driving layup to lift the Lights to the lead, and ultimately the win.

"It was just a great college basketball game," Huse said. "Both teams played really well, on both ends of the floor. I think Tech is a very good, very talented team, capable of beating anybody in this league. They played great, and made big shots all night long.

"And it took big shots and big free throws, in a loud, very challenging environment, by our guys to come out on top," he continued. "Corbin made many big shots and big free throws, but so did pretty much all our guys. Mike LaValley hit a big shot, Gabe Finley hit a big shot, and every one of our starters made big shots and big plays to help us win. It was a tough, back-and-forth game, and it’s one we feel very fortunate to come out of with a win. I was extremely proud of our guys for staying the course, and playing at such a high level in what was a really great basketball game."

Pearson was indeed the catalyst for MSU-N, scoring 26 points and grabbing six rebounds. He was a perfect 4-of-4 from the 3-point-line, while West knocked in two triples and scored 21 points, including the game-winner. In all, Northern knocked in nine three’s and withstood a game-high 28 points from Tech’s Antonio Snow and another 22 from Adam Greger.
As high as Northern was after leaving Butte Friday night, the Lights hit a lull on Saturday in their loss to Carroll.

After a defensive slugfest in the first half, which saw Northern trail 24-22 at the break, Carroll caught fire. The Saints, who were winless in conference play heading into the game, shot better than 50 percent from the floor in the second half, and two huge three’s by Zach Taylor, who scored 16 points in the second half, gave the Saints a seven-point cushion, and Northern couldn’t answer. Carroll was able to defend the lead the rest of the way, and going 7-for-8 from downtown in the second half proved to be the difference in Carroll getting its first conference win under new head coach Carson Cunningham.

“At the end of the day, what it came down to was, Carroll shot the ball really well, they really got hot,” Huse said. “And we were below average shooting the ball. I thought we played really well defensively, our effort was great. And again, we shared the ball well, we executed what we wanted and we got great looks all night. But eventually, you have to put the ball in the basket and we didn’t do that nearly enough.”

In their lowest offensive output of the season, the Lights shot 40 percent from the floor, and went just 7-of-23 from three. MSU-N went to the foul line just eight times as well, while Carroll out-rebounded the Lights 27-24. Pearson paced Northern yet again, scoring 14 points to go along with nine rebounds, while Alfie Miller chipped in with 11 points and West added eight. Chris McGrath scored a game-high 18 for Carroll, while Dennis Mikelonis added 13 to Taylor’s 16.

The loss dropped Northern to 4-3 in the Frontier. The Lights (16-5) are now in a three-way tie for third with Lewis-Clark State and Rocky Mountain College, while another wild weekend saw Great Falls, UM-Western and Westminster move to a three-way tie for first place.

Northern will now look to put the Carroll game in the past when the Lights host the Argos Friday night at the Armory Gymnasium.

“It’s tough to swallow a loss like the one against Carroll,” Huse said, “mainly because in every phase of the game, except shooting, I felt like we played better than we did when we played them at home. But you have to tip your hat to Carroll, too. They played really well and made a lot of big shots in the second half. Now we just have to regroup and get ready to play well against UGF.”

Lights are 4-3 in the Frontier, 16-5 overall; Next Up: Vs Great Falls Friday Night

Lights 83, Montana Tech 82 2OT

**MSU-N** - Corbin Pearson 10-15 2-4 26, Jesse Vaughan 1-2 3-4 5, Roshawn West 6-10 7-9 21, Allan Brown 2-9 0-0 6, Alfie Miller 2-4 2-2 7, Nicholas Blount 1-6 0-1 2, Gabe Finley 1-4 2-2 4, Mike LaValley 2-6 2-2 6, Will Perry 3-6 0-0 6. TOTALS: 28-62 18-24 83.

**TECH** - Brandon Rydberg 1-1 4-4 7, Adam Greger 10-19 0-0 22, Marcus Payne 3-4 3-4 9, Bryan Bock 5-11, 2-2 12, Antonio Snow 12-23 3-7 28, Travis Peevey 0-0 0-0 0, Roman Pruneda-Garza 0-0 1-2 1, Keegan McCarthy 1-2 0-0 2, Austin Davis 0-1 1-3 1. TOTALS: 32-61 14-22.

Halftime score: Northern 30-28; 3-point FG: MSUN 9-20 (Pearson 4-4, Brown 2-3, West 2-4, Miller 1-2), Tech 4-11 (Greger 2-5, Rydberg 1-1, Snow 1-2); Rebounds: MSUN 30 (Pearson 6), Tech 30 (Payne 11), Assists: MSUN 13 (West 3), Tech 6 (Bock and Snow each with 2); Blocked Shots: MSUN 3 (Pearson 3), Tech 1 (Payne 1); Steals: MSUN 8 (Vaughn 3), Tech 3 (Snow 2), Total Fouls: MSUN 20, Tech 17; Fouled Out: None; Turnovers: MSUN 6, Tech 13.

Carroll 56, Lights 47

**MSU-N** - Corbin Pearson 5-9 3-4 14, Jesse Vaughan 0-3 0-0 0, Roshawn West 3-10 1-2 8, Allan Brown 2-4 0-0 5, Alfie Miller 4-11 0-0 11, Gabe Finley 3-4 0-1 7, Mike LaValley 0-1 0-0 0, Will Perry 1-2 0-1 4, Xavier Shaw 0-0 0-0 0. Team totals 18-44 4-8 47.
**CC** - Jake Hollifield 2-4 0-1 4, Dennis Mikelonis 6-11 0-2 13, Zayn Kirkendoll 1-5 2-2 4, Zach Taylor 6-13 2-2 16, Chris McGrath 6-7 2-2 18, Ian Lorang 0-0 0-0 0, Everett Johnston 0-0 0-0 0, Nick Williams 0-1 0-0 0, Andrew Campbell 0-0 0-0 0, Tad Rose 0-0 1-3 1. Team 21-41 7-12 56.

Halftime - CC 24, MSU-N 22.3-pointers – MSU-N 7-23 (Pearson 1-3, West 1-6, Brown 1-3, Miller 3-9, Finley 1-1, LaValley 0-1); CC 7-8 (Mikelonis 1-2, Taylor 2-2, McGrath 4-4). Rebounds – MSU-N 24 (Pearson 9); CC 27 (Hollifield 8). Assists – MSU-N 7 (Vaughan 2, West 2); CC 9 (Kirkendoll 3, Taylor 3). Personal fouls – Msu-N 15, CC 16. Fouled out – none. Technicals – none.