Lights top Argos 54-50 for the second time in six days
By George Ferguson
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When the Frontier Conference men’s basketball schedule came out last summer, Montana State University-Northern head coach Shawn Huse knew playing back-to-back games against the University of Great Falls was going to be a tremendous challenge.

But even a wily veteran of the Frontier like Huse couldn’t have predicted what would transpire between the Lights and Argos over the course of the last six days.

Last Friday night in Havre, Northern knocked off UGF 54-50 in a tight affair, something that’s become typical of the rivalry. Then, just a scant six days later, the Lights would do it all over again. Astonishingly, the Lights beat the No. 25 Argos by the exact same score Thursday night at the McLaughlin Center in Great Falls. MSU-N senior Roshawn West’s free throws with just :09 left sealed a 54-50 win for the Lights, and a season sweep of the once first-place Argos.

The win wasn’t just Northern’s second straight over the Argos, but it was the Lights’ second straight over a nationally ranked NAIA opponent. It was also the second straight season the Lights beat UGF in Great Falls, and the latest victory kept MSU-N in first place in the league standings heading into Saturday night.

The Lights are now 6-3 in the Frontier and 18-5 overall.

“When we looked at the schedule, we did realize what a tough situation, having to play UGF in back-to-back games,” Huse said. “So to come away with two wins against them, we couldn’t feel better about that. Last Friday’s win was a big one, and so was this one.

“At the same time, we understand, there’s a lot of basketball left,” he continued. “We’re very glad to get another big one, but we know we have a lot of work left to do.”

The score of Thursday night’s game might have been a repeat of last Friday, but the way the contest unfolded was completely different. In Great Falls, the Lights didn’t need a late-game comeback to win. Instead, Northern took control at the onset of the second half. Tied at 26-26 at halftime, the Lights started the second stanza on a 10-1 run, and they would never trail again. UGF would come back and tighten the game at times in the second half, but big 3-pointers from Jesse Vaughan and Allan Brown, as well as two in the final five minutes by Alfie Miller, gave the Lights a nine-point lead with just over three minutes to go.

In what was an absolute defensive struggle, UGF tried to make one furious rally. T.J. Harris hit a triple with just under a minute to go to narrow the gap to two points. Miller would answer with a pair of foul shots to put the Lights back up four, but Marcel Towns nailed a bomb of his own to make the score 50-40 with under 30 seconds left. From there, however, Miller would make two more free throws and West would sink the final charity shots to clinch the big win for the Lights.
"Credit UGF, they were just never going to go away," Huse said. "They play so hard and they just keep coming at you. I thought we actually played better offensively than we did last Friday, but then you look at the final score and you realize we sputtered again. And UGF’s defense has something to do with that.

"But obviously, I feel like we were really good on defense tonight," he continued. "I thought we came in and really got after it for 40 minutes, and that’s where this game was won for us. We did have guys step up and make some big shots, and guys really clutched up at the free-throw-line down the stretch. I was really proud of Jesse (Vaughan) tonight. He played a great game and that was really nice to see. He was also really good on the defensive end, and that’s where we really won this game, with our defense, and I couldn’t be prouder of our effort. Our guys just weren’t going to be denied on that end."

Vaughan led the Lights with a game-high 18 points and two of MSU-N’s nine three’s. Miller finished with 13 and three triples while West hit two bombs and chipped in with 10 points. Towns paced the Argos with 18 but Northern really limited the Argos offensively. The Lights won the battle of the boards and capitalized on 12 UGF miscues.

Now, with the huge road win in tow, the Lights can look ahead to Saturday night’s game against Lewis-Clark State in Lewiston, Idaho. Northern is one full game in front of LCSC in the league standings, but the Warriors are the highest-scoring offense in the Frontier, so Huse knows his team will have to be on point defensively yet again.

“This is a tough road trip,” Huse said. “LC is a very good basketball team, and we know that game is going to be a challenge for us. But I’m just so proud of our guys for gutting this one out tonight. It’s certainly a big win for us.”

The Lights and Warriors will tip at 8:30 p.m. M.S.T. Saturday night. Northern returns home to host Montana Tech and LCSC next weekend.

**Lights 54, Great Falls 50**

**MSU-N** - Corbin Pearson 0-3 1-2 1, Mike LaValley 0-2 0-0 0, Allan Brown 2-7 0-2 6, Jesse Vaughan 8-14 0-0 18, Alfie Miller 3-9 4-4 13, Will Perry 3-4 0-0 6, Roshawn West 3-7 2-2 10, Gabe Finley 0-1 0-0 0, Nicholas Blount 0-2 0-0 0. Totals 19-49 7-10 54

**UGF** - TJ Harris 3-10 2-4 10, Shawn Williams 1-4 3-6 5, Reid Tramelli 1-2 0-1 2, Naren Maynard 2-3 1-3 5, Maleek Singleton 3-6 2-2 8, Marcel Towns 6-11 5-8 18, Chris Schlesser 0-0 0-0 0, Daniel Arcau 1-1 0-0 2, Cole Colvin 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 17-38 13-24 50

Halftime: Tied at 26. 3-pt FG: MSUN 9-27 (Pearson 0-1, LaValley 0-1, Brown 2-5, Vaughan 2-3, Miller 3-8, Perry 0-1, West 2-6, Blount 0-2), Great Falls 3-8 (Harris 2-5, Williams 0-1, Towns 1-1, Colvin 0-1). Rebounds: MSUN 28 (Pearson 6, Vaughan 6, West 6), Great Falls 26 (Towns 8). Fouls Montana State-Northern 21, University of Great Falls 18. Fouled out: Maynard Williams . Technical: none. Assists: MSUN 14 (West 5), Great Falls 4 (Towns 2). Steals: MSUN 2 (Pearson 1, Miller 1), Great Falls 3 (Harris 1, Tramelli 1, Singleton 1). Blocked shots: MSUN 1 (Brown 1), Great Falls 2 (Tramelli 1, Towns 1). Turnovers: MSUN 10, Great Falls 12.