Lights earn key road win at Western
By George Ferguson
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The Montana State University-Northern Lights are no strangers to close games. But three weeks worth of
dogfights and the Lights have now won six in a row.

MSU-N was in another battle Thursday night in Dillon, but a strong second half, a stellar performance from
the free-throw-line and clutch scores by Corbin Pearson and Roshawn West lifted the No. 20 Lights to a 71-
65 win over the UM-Western Bulldogs.

The win wasn’t just Northern’s sixth straight, it also gave the Lights a season sweep of the Bulldogs, who
have now fallen to 7-6 in league play, as well as moved them to 10-3 in the Frontier Conference and a half-
game ahead of Rocky Mountain College in the league standings.

“I thought we were extremely poised once again,” MSU-N head coach Shawn Huse said. “We’ve been in a
lot of tough games this season, and again tonight, our guys really were poised all night. We were
aggressive when we needed to be and patient when we needed to be. And I thought throughout the game,
we got the shot we wanted, and not the shot they (Bulldogs) wanted us to take. We were good from the
free-throw-line and we made key shots down the stretch. So I’m just really very proud of this team for
coming down here and being so focused and playing as well as they did.”

The Bulldogs, who Northern beat last month in Havre, took an early lead, but the Lights countered by
making eight first-half 3-pointers. Pearson, West and Allan Brown hit clutch three’s to help the Lights forge
a 35-35 halftime tie.

But where Northern really made hay was on the defensive end in the second stanza. The Lights held
Western to just six points through the first eight minutes of the half, and by the time the game was under
10 minutes left, MSU-N found itself leading by 11 points. Western would fight valiantly, clawing all the way
back to 67-65 on a Tyler Miller triple with under two minutes to go. But from there, Pearson and West made
back-to-back layups, while the Lights were also perfect on the charity stripe in the final minute.

“Credit Western,” Huse said. “They took it to us to start the game and we had to dig deep just to stay in it
in the first half. And they certainly didn’t go away. They made some nice plays to make it close down the
stretch. But I thought our guys did a great job of staying poised and taking control right back at the end. I
thought we made big shots and we were very good from the free-throw line. I’m just really proud of how
focused we were and how well we executed when we needed too.”

The free-throw-line was good to the Lights. MSU-N went a stellar 21-of-25 from the line, while Pearson and
West each totaled 20 points. Pearson hit two three’s and also made 8-of-9 foul shots. Alfie Miller chipped in with nine for MSU-N and Brown added
eight. Western got a game-high 22 points by Maazin Butler and Jordan Overtstreet scored 19, but it wasn’t
enough to offset Northern’s crisp execution or its stellar defense in the second half.

“It is a big win, and one these guys deserve and should be very proud of,” Huse said. “I was proud of the
way our leaders stepped up tonight, and the guys who came in off the bench. Everybody played well and
did something to help us win this game tonight. It’s an important win for us, and one these guys should
take pride in.”

With Thursday night’s huge win in tow, the Lights (22-5) can now turn their attention to a crucial rematch
with the Westminster Griffins. Westminster is still just a game back of the Lights in the Frontier standings
after beating UGF Thursday night in Salt Lake City, with the league race so tight, Saturday night’s game will have lasting implications about who wins the league title.

Still, for the streaking Lights, Huse says his team must simply play better than it did when the Griffins stunned the Lights 69-59 last month in the Armory Gymnasium.

“We have to play better,” Huse said. “We believe we can play better against them than we did the first time, but we haven’t proven that yet. And we’re going to have to prove it on their home floor. That’s the goal, that’s what we’re going in there trying to do, just play much better basketball than we did the first time we played them.”

Like Northern, the Griffins (9-4, 16-10) are hot. They’ve won four straight in league play, including Thursday night’s 58-54 win over the Argos. Westminster has won in a variety of ways too. The Griffins are a high-scoring club, averaging around 75 points per game while only allowing about 68 points per night.

Individually, the Griffins are balanced and deep. Tallon Robertson (6-5) leads the way at 18 points per night, and he had a huge game against the Lights the last time out. But he gets help from Blake Skidmore’s 16 per night, while six other Griffins average between six and 10 points per contest.

But where Westminster really hurt the Lights was on defense. The Griffins smothered Northern and never let the Lights get into a rhythm from the 3-point-line last month. However, MSU-N is playing its best basketball of the season, and Thursday night’s win in Dillon proves the Lights know how to win close games on the road, and it also proves the Lights are focused. There was no letdown following MSU-N’s two heroic wins last weekend in Havre.

“Our guys are confident,” Huse said. “They believe they can win anywhere. But we haven’t proven that yet against Westminster. We have to go in there and execute really well on both ends of the floor. We have to go down there and play Northern basketball.”

Saturday night’s showdown between the Lights and Griffins starts at 7:30 p.m. in Salt Lake City. Northern will return home to close out the regular season against Dickinson State next Thursday night and Rocky Mountain College next Friday.

**Lights are 10-3 in the Frontier, 22-5 overall; Next Up: at Westminster Saturday**

**Lights 71, Western 65**

**MSU-N** – Roshawn West 6-10 4-4 20, Nicholas Blount 0-1 0-0 0, Allan Brown 1-4 5-6 8, Corbin Pearson 5-7 8-9 20, Alfie Miller 2-5 3-4 9, Gabe Finley 3-5 0-0 6, Mike LaValley 0-6 0-0 0, Damian Robinson 1-1 0-0 2, Will Perry 1-2 1-2 3, Jesse Vaughan 1-6 0-0 3. Totals: 20-47 21-25 71.

**UM-W** – Shyke Smalls 0-0 0-0 0, Maazin Butler 8-14 4-4 22, Kurtis Parson 0-0 2-4 2, Tyler Miller 3-4 0-0 7, Jake Owsley 4-9 3-5 11, Conner Woodhill 0-0 1-2 1, Jordan Overstreet 6-11 5-6 19, Kris Castro 1-2 1-2 3, Vince Turk 0-1 0-0 0, Gabe Rucker 0-2 0-1 0. Totals: 22-43 16-24 65.

Halftime. Tied at 35-35. 3-pointers: MSU-N 10-26 (West 4, Brown 1, Pearson 2, Miller 2, Vaughan 1), UM-W 5-10 (Butler 2, Overstreet 2, Miller 1); Rebounds: MSU-N 25 (West 5, Miller 5, Perry 5), UM-W 30 (Overstreet 5); Fouls: MSU-N 20, UM-W 19. Fouled out: None.