Tonight, the Montana State University-Northern men’s basketball team has what can only be described as a winner-take-all game with Rocky Mountain College in the Armory Gymnasium. But if the Lights didn’t take care of the struggling, but dangerous, Dickinson State Blue Hawks, tonight’s game wouldn’t really be the NAIA Game of the Week.

Instead, No. 18 Northern took care of business and then some, blowing out the Blue Hawks wire-to-wire Thursday night at the Armory Gymnasium. The Lights earned the Frontier Conference sweep over DSU by winning 81-52. Northern improved to 11-4 in the Frontier, setting up tonight’s showdown with RMC.

“Coach established that early on this week,” Northern senior Will Perry, who scored 13 points Thursday night said. “Beating Rocky on Friday night really wouldn’t be as important if we didn’t beat Dickinson first. So that was our only focus, was to take care of business against Dickinson, and we did that.”

The Lights took care of business in every phase of Thursday night’s contest, against a DSU squad against which Northern needed a last-second shot in overtime to beat last month in North Dakota. But Thursday was different. MSU-N shot a blistering 52 percent from the field for the game and made 13-of-25 3-pointers. The Lights shot 61 percent in the first half and made eight triples, including back-to-back bombs by Alfie Miller and two treys by fellow senior Mike LaValley. Perry got in the act early two, scoring eight points in the first half, and his tip-in with 7:40 left in the half gave the Lights a 28-8 lead with seven minutes before halftime.

And when LaValley knocked in his third three of the half, the Lights went into the locker room with a 44-16 lead and the game was all but over.

“I thought our execution was good, our focus was really good and we were very poised,” Northern head coach Shawn Huse said. “It was nice to see us play such a complete first half. I thought we were really alert defensively, and we forced them to miss early. And we capitalized on that by making shots ourselves. So credit to our guys for coming out focused right away. I thought, offensively, we were really sharp, and, defensively, we played hard and disrupted them (Blue Hawk). They have some really good players who can be unstoppable at times, so I was really proud of our focus and effort on defense tonight.”

“We knocked down a lot of shots early,” Perry added. “When our shooters are splashing it like they did tonight, it just opens everything up in the middle, and that’s where we were really good tonight. We really got going offensively.”
And the Lights didn’t let up. DSU never threatened in the second half, as Northern was able to play its full roster and still pull away from the Blue Hawks, who are leaving the Frontier after this season. DSU did play better in the second half, but MSU-N held the Hawks to 29 percent shooting in the first 20 minutes and they could never catch up. The MSU-N defense limited Tevin Russell, who came in averaging 17 points per game, to just 12, while no other Hawk got into double figures. The Lights also out-rebounded DSU 31-23 and forced 18 turnovers.

On the other end, MSU-N was extremely balanced. Miller nailed four three’s and scored 14 points, while Roshawn West hit three triples and matched Perry’s 13. LaValley had yet another clutch game off the bench, also scoring 13, while Corbin Pearson finished with nine points and a game-high seven rebounds.

Now, with such a dominating performance against the Blue Hawks, the Lights (23-6) can turn their attention to tonight’s matchup with first-place RMC (11-3, 20-6). The No. 10 Battlin’ Bears beat Northern last month in Billings and bring a seven-game winning streak into tonight’s senior night game at the Armory. With a win, Northern can clinch a share of the league title, and an RMC loss at Great Falls Saturday would give the Lights the regular season title outright.

“Tonight (Thursday) was a really good, total team win,” Huse said. “Our leaders led us win we needed them too, and our bench played great. Everybody was focused and ready to go tonight. It was a complete game by the whole team.

“And now that sets up a big final conference game with Rocky,” he continued. “It’s going to be a great game, and hopefully we can come in and play at a high level like we did tonight.”

Tonight’s senior night tilt between the Lights and Bears will tip off at 8 inside the Armory Gymnasium. It’s the regular season finale for Northern, while RMC travels to UGF Saturday night.

Lights are 11-4 in the Frontier, 23-6 overall; Next Up: vs No. 10 RMC tonight

Lights 81, Dickinson State 52

**DSU** – Jeremy Beehler 0-1 0-0 0, Ty Ackelson 1-3 1-2 3, Brock Boos 0-2 1-2 1, Isiah Thomas 1-2 0-0 2, Mackenson Odeneir 4-7 1-4 9, Josh Toergerson 1-1 0-0 3, Juston Goodwin 2-6 1-2 6, Robbie Moorey 1-3 0-0 2, Tevin Russell 3-5 6-7 12, Jeremy Samuelson 2-3 0-0 5, Jacob Volk 2-2 0-0 6. Totals: 17-38 11-22 52.

**MSU-N**– Corbin Pearson 3-4 2-4 9, Jesse Vaughan 2-4 1-1 5, Roshawn West 5-10 0-2 13, Allan Brown 0-0 0-0 0, Alfie Miller 4-5 2-2 14, Nicholas Blount 1-3 0-0 3, Gabe Finley 1-3 2-3 4, Anfernee Standing Rock 0-1 0-2 0, Miek LaValley 4-9 2-3 13, Damian Robinson 0-1 0-0 0, Will Perry 4-5 5-5 13, Pat Jensen 1-1 0-0 3, Xavier Shaw 0-2 4-6 4. Totals: 25-48 18-28 81.

Halftime: Northern 44-16. 3-pointers: DSU 4-13 (Toergerson 1, Goodwin 1, Volk 2), MSU-N 13-25 (Pearson 1, West 3, Miller 4, Blount 1, LaValley 3, Jensen 1); Rebounds: DSU 28 (Goodwin 6), MSU-N 31 (Pearson 7); Fouls: DSU 24, MSU-N 21; Fouled out: None; Technical Fouls: Ackelson, 18:12, 2nd.