Momentum can be a great ally in the game of basketball. But not when your opponent seems to have all of it.

And despite winning six of its last seven games, that’s what the Montana State University-Northern men’s basketball team ran into in its chance to grab a share of the Frontier Conference regular season title Friday night in Havre. In front of a sold-out Armory Gymnasium crowd, the No. 10 Rocky Mountain College Battlin’ Bears brought a force of momentum to Havre and hung on to it all night long in a 77-66 win over the No. 18 Lights. The regular season finale loss gave the Lights an 11-5 finish in conference play and a 23-7 overall record.

The Bears (12-4, 23-7), who came into Havre with a seven-game winning streak, clinched the regular season title and home-court advantage throughout the Frontier playoffs, and they did it by hitting big shot after big shot, and by never letting the MSU-N offense get a head of steam. Northern made just six 3-pointers in Friday night’s clash, and never had a lead of more than three points. MSU-N’s biggest scoring run was just six points, and the Lights shot a bitter 37 percent from the floor.

“I thought we played well enough defensively,” MSU-N head coach Shawn Huse said. “Rocky is a very explosive team. They have some very, very talented players. But I thought we did a good enough job defensively. Our effort was very good.

“The bottom line is, we just didn’t shoot it like we’re capable of,” he continued. “They (Bears) made shots, especially at key moments in the game, and we didn’t. I think we’re a very good defensive team, but in games like this, you have to be able to answer the bell on the offensive end, and we didn’t do that enough tonight and Rocky did.”

Huse’s assessment was spot on. The Bears shot a blistering 57 percent for the game and though they made just five 3-pointers, all of them seemed to be crushing blows to Northern’s chances.

Junior guard Tyree Anderson set the tone with a game-opening trey as Rocky jumped out to a quick 11-6 lead. Meanwhile, Northern looked to go inside and it worked early as Corbin Pearson was active in the paint. And when Jesse Vaughan nailed MSU-N’s second triple of the half, the Lights had their first lead at 20-19. But RMC would have answers all night long, and when Jeremy Nicholas buried a three with under two minutes left in the first stanza, the Bears had reclaimed the lead, and would take a 34-30 edge into halftime.

“Give Rocky a ton of credit,” Huse said. “They came in here and played well. They were hitting their shots, especially in the first half, whereas, I thought, we looked like a team who had played a game the night before. Our shooters just didn’t seem to have fresh legs. But that’s not to take anything away from Rocky because they played really well. We just didn’t make enough shots, and that’s disappointing.”
MSU-N didn’t make enough big shots, as Rocky did a great job of taking the Frontier’s best 3-point shooter, Northern senior Alfie Miller, out of the game. But when Miller did finally hit a big trey midway through the second half, it looked like the Lights were going to finally seize the momentum. Pearson followed Miller’s bomb with two straight buckets and the Lights had a 56-54 lead with 10 minutes left.

But RMC stopped Northern’s momentum dead in its tracks as Malachi Roberts and Nicholas scored on back-to-back possessions, then Anderson turned an MSU-N turnover into his second trey of the contest and, all of sudden, the Bears had stormed right back in front 61-56 in less than two minutes. And the Bears weren’t done, as they turned that 7-0 run into a 13-0 spurt and led by double digits with 6:33 to play. A Roshawn West three would eventually cut the lead back down to five points, but the Bears never let Northern’s comeback hopes become a reality and they walked out of the Armory with the Frontier title in hand, and a season sweep of the Lights to boot.

The Lights finished the game just 6-of-20 from three, while Pearson scored a game-high 21 points, going 10-of-11 from the free-throw-line. West added 12 points and Miller had 11, but he only got off six attempts from the arc as he was blanketed by 6-9 RMC center Joel Barndt for long periods of the game. Vaughan and Will Perry each added seven points for the Lights, while RMC, which spoiled an emotional senior night in the Armory, got 17 points from Nicholas, 16 points and nine rebounds from Barndt and another 15 by Anderson. RMC also had the rebounding edge and only turned the ball over an efficient six times.

But as disappointing as the loss was for the Lights, their season is far from over, and Huse says his team must let the loss to the Bears go and get ready to go after the Frontier’s postseason championship.

“Tonight, this is a bitter pill to swallow,” Huse said. “The guys are disappointed, but they have to understand we can’t let this missed opportunity define our season. This team has done a great job of getting themselves into the position they are in right now, and were in tonight (A chance to win the Frontier’s regular season title). We’ve played really well for much of the last month and more, and we just have to realize that. We have to let this one go, regroup and move on because there’s still a lot of important basketball games in our future.”

Because Westminster beat Montana Tech Saturday night, the Lights fell to the No. 3 seed in the Frontier playoffs. That means MSU-N will host UGF on Friday night in a Frontier quarterfinal game.

**Lights are 11-5 in Frontier and 23-7 overall; Next Up: Vs UGF Friday**

**Rocky Mountain 77, Lights 66**

**RMC** – Joel Barndt 8-14 0-0 16, Jeremy Nicholas 4-7 8-10 17, Sian Lane 2-4 909 5, Tyree Anderson 3-5 7-9 15, Malachi Roberts 3-6 3-3 9, Matt Strickland 2-3 4-4 9, Taylor Longo 1-3 3-4 5, Danny Little 0-2 1-2 1. Totals: 23-44 26-32 77.

**MSU-N** – Corbin Pearson 5-16 10-11 21, Jesse Vaughan 3-6 0-0 7, Roshawn West 3-9 5-6 12, Allan Brown 0-3 2-2 2, Alfie Miller 3-9 3-4 11, Nicholas Blount 0-0 0-0 0, Gabe Finley 1-2 1-2 3, Mike LaValley 1-3 0-0 3, Damian Robinson 0-0 0-0 0, Will Perry 3-3 1-1 7, Xavier Shaw 0-0 0-0 0. Totals: 19-51 22-26 66.

Halftime: Rocky Mountain 34-30. 3-pointers: RMC 5-8 (Nicholas 1, Lane 1, Anderson 2, Strickland 1), MSU-N 6-20 (Pearson 1, Vaughan 1, West 1, Miller 2, LaValley 1); Rebounds: RMC 30 (Brandt 9), MSU-N 27 (Miller 5); Fouls: RMC 19, MSU-N 19; Fouled out: None.