They say the third time’s a charm. But the Montana State University-Northern men’s basketball team is hoping that’s not the case tonight.

The No. 18 Lights (23-7) are home tonight to face the University of Great Falls Argos (17-12) in a Frontier Conference quarterfinal game, which tips off at 7 inside the Armory Gymnasium.

And the Lights will be trying to beat the Argos for a third time this season, something that head coach Shawn Huse said won’t be easy to do. Northern beat the Argos 54-50 in Havre back on Jan. 24, and the Lights beat them again 54-50 six days later in Great Falls.

“It’s not ideal to play anybody in this league three times,” Huse said. “But that’s the nature of the playoffs. And playing UGF a third time will be a very big challenge for us. We didn’t exactly blow them out either time we faced them. They were both close, hard-fought games. So we understand, we’re going to have to play really well to get ‘em a third time.”

MSU-N and UGF come into tonight’s game on different ends of season-ending matchups with Frontier champion Rocky Mountain College. Last Friday night, the Battlin’ Bears beat the Lights 77-66 in Havre, taking a share of the regular season title away from Northern in the process. One night after spoiling senior night at Northern, the Bears went to Great Falls to face the Argos on their senior night, and UGF responded with a 91-76 victory.

So, UGF will bring some confidence and momentum into tonight’s game, which is the third straight year in which the Lights and Argos have faced off in the playoffs in Havre. MSU-N has won all three, but UGF will be poised for the upset tonight. Marcel Towns captured the scoring title again this season with his 21-points-per-game average, and he will be gunning not to let his illustrious career end in the Armory Gymnasium. But Towns is just part of a dangerous Argos attack. Point guard T.J. Harris (5-10), reserve guard Shawn Williams (6-0) and Maleek Singleton (6-1) give the Argos a powerful scoring punch, especially off dribble penetration, while Naren Maynerd (6-6) is a handful in the paint.

As a unit, UGF averages 77 points per game, while Towns is 12th in the nation in scoring. But like MSU-N, UGF is also really good defensively. The Argos allow just 66 points per game, which is eighth in the NAIA, while Towns is third in the country with 89 steals.

“They are very explosive,” Huse said of the Argos. “We just saw what they can do on offense against Rocky on Saturday night. So in order to have success, we’re going to have to set the tone on defense right from the start.”

All season long, the Lights have been excellent on defense, and have been especially good against the Argos. Northern finished the regular season allowing just 62 points per contest, which is fourth in the NAIA.
But Northern is also a good offensive team, and especially good from beyond the arc. The Lights have made 271 three’s this season, and they will get looks against UGF’s patented zone defense tonight.

But getting good looks isn’t enough. The Lights must knock down those shots, and that’s something they didn’t do enough of in tough home losses to RMC and Westminster this season. Still, Alfie Miller is one of the best 3-point shooters in the country and has had big games against UGF in the past. Roshawn West and Allan Brown should also be dangerous tonight, while Corbin Pearson has been on a roll the last two months, and has led the Lights in scoring and rebounding down the stretch.

“We have to be good defensively,” Huse said. “UGF can put points on the board in a hurry. But we can’t just expect that to win us this game. We have to find ways to score, too. It hasn’t been easy against them (Argos), either. So we’ll have to be ready to execute and make some adjustments along the way.”

Emotion will be a factor tonight as well. UGF is playing for its season, as the Argos will not be an at-large team when the NAIA field is selected in two weeks. It’s win-or-go-home time for UGF, so they’ll play like it tonight.

Meanwhile, Northern seniors Miller, West, Brown, Will Perry and Mike LaValley were honored last Friday, but tonight’s game could very well be their last in the Armory. If the brackets go according to form, MSU-N would have to go on the road twice in order to win the Frontier title. The Lights are also fighting to stay in the hunt for at least an NAIA at-large berth, but are also believers that they can win the Frontier title, too. So there’s plenty at stake.

“This league is so good this year, it’s so tough,” Huse said. “So anybody we were going to draw in this game was going to be a tough matchup. And UGF is no exception. It’s a huge game, for both teams, just like it always is in the playoffs.

“And for us, we can’t think about what we did the first two times we played them,” he continued. “Because I don’t believe that will be good enough to beat them a third time. We have to play even better this time around. We are going to have to play really, really well to be successful.”

Tonight’s Frontier playoff game between the Lights and Argos tips off at 7 inside the Armory Gymnasium. If the Lights prevail, they will visit Westminster in the semifinals next Friday. Should UGF win tonight, the Argos would travel to Rocky next Friday. Tonight’s other quarterfinal game pits fourth-seeded UM-Western hosting fifth-seeded Lewis-Clark State in Dillon.

**Frontier Men's Playoffs No. 18 Lights (23-7) vs Great Falls (17-12) Tonight at 7 in the Armory Gymnasium**

**Radio:** 92.5 KPQX FM

**Streaming:** wwww.msun.edu/athletics

**Twitter:** Twitter/Havredaily

**MSU-N Probable Starters**

G Allan Brown, Sr. 6 ppg
G Alfie Miller, Sr. 14 ppg
G Roshawn West, Sr. 10 pp
F Corbin Pearson, Jr. 13 ppg
F Jesse Vaughan, Jr. 7 ppg