Lights shine against Thunder in season opener
By George Ferguson
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The start was sluggish for the Montana State University-Northern Lights in their season opener, but eventually, they played the kind of basketball you would expect to see from a team with aspirations of qualifying for the NAIA national basketball tournament come March.

In a nonconference matchup against the University of Concordia of Canada, the Lights used a 25-4 run in the first half to take control of the game, then cruised to an easy 103-56 win inside the Armory Gymnasium Thursday night.

Early on, it appeared as though the Thunder may be able to hang with the Lights and they even grabbed a 7-3 lead just minutes into the game. But, the Lights quickly responded with a 9-0 run that included a pair of baskets by Trevail Lee and a put back by Damian Robinson that gave Northern a 12-9 lead with 13:47 left in the first half.

Then, after two three-pointers by Jermaine Graves, the second coming with 11:25 to go in the half, the Lights built a 22-13 lead. The Thunder answered with a trey from Rob Haack and a two-point jumper by Ryan McLaren that trimmed the deficit to 22-19 with 9:27 remaining in the open half.

That was as close as the Thunder would get.

Lee was fouled on a three-point shot and made all three free throws to push the lead back to six and then Corbin Pearson connected on back-to-back shots to make the score 29-19. Haack scored for Concordia to make it 29-21 but Northern reeled off another 8-0 run, highlighted by another basket by Pearson, as well as a long jumper by Warren Edmondson that helped MSU-N grow its lead to 37-21 with 6:33 to go in the half.

“I thought we did a good job of picking up our intensity on defense nicely after a bit of a slow start,” Northern head coach Shawn Huse said. “Offensively, I was definitely pleased with the extra passing, the step ins that we had and getting on the floor for loose balls and at this point in the season that is the main thing you are looking for.”

By the time that Anfernee Standing Rock and Pat Jensen connected on a pair of triples late in the second half, the Lights had built an insurmountable 56-29 advantage. But as time was running out, the Lights got in one more back-breaking three. With two seconds remaining, Edmondson connected from distance to put Northern up 61-33 at the intermission, which effectively ended any hope of victory for Concordia.

If there was any doubt about the outcome, the Lights ended it quickly as they went on an 11-2 run to open the second half, a run that featured two more three-pointers from Jensen and another from Nicholas Blount to give Northern a 72-35 lead with just over 16 minutes to go in the game.

The Lights hot-shooting night continued when Edmondson hit threes on back-to-back possessions to extend the lead to 81-39 with 13:02 left in the game. And from there the rout was on.
“We know that we have some shooters,” Huse said. “It’s just a matter of staying with it and at some point, with this group, we should be able to open it up with some threes and I thought we did that tonight, especially in the second half.”

Offensively, it was a balanced effort for the Lights in the 47-point victory with five players reaching double figures. The high scorer was Robinson, who had a double-double on the night with 17 points and 11 rebounds.

Edmondson added 14 points and six boards in the win, while Jensen buried three treys on his way to a 13-point performance. Graves and Brett Thompson added 10 points apiece for MSU-N.

“I thought that we had a lot of guys play well,” Huse said. “We had a number of guys that reached double figures, so we had a lot of guys that played well but if I was going to single out any group it would be our returners who did a good job of setting the tone and helping the new guys get ready.”

The Thunder had two players in double digits on the night, with Artez Scharer leading Concordia with 12 points and Haack also contributing with 11.

“Right now we have a long way to go,” Huse said. “We made a bunch of little mistakes tonight but I thought it was a good start. (Concordia) will do well at the level they play but at the same time we know it will be different when conference plays comes. It’s early right now but we are excited.”

The Lights will be back in action next Friday when they host Northwest Indian College at the Armory Gymnasium. Tip-off is scheduled for 3 p.m.

**Lights 103, Concordia 56**

**Concordia** – Rob Coleman 0-4 4-8 4, Rob Haack 2-3 5-7 11, Nathaniel Wojcicki 3-5 0-0 6, Artez Scharer 4-14 4-4 12, Ryan McLaren 2-4 0-0 5, Tommy Soltys 0-2 1-2 1, Brett Jakubec 2-4 0-2 4, Will Pittman 2-3 0-0 4, Tyler Roth 2-5 3-4 7.

**Lights** – Corbin Pearson 2-4 3-4 7, Jesse Vaughn 2-5 0-0 4, Trevail Lee 2-7 3-3 7, Nicholas Blount 3-13 2-2 9, Jermaine Graves 3-7 3-3 10, Warren Edmonson 6-11 0-1 14, Dylan Tatarka 2-3 0-0 5, Anfernee Standing Rock 1-1 0-0 3, Brett Thompson 4-8 0-0 10, Damian Robinson 6-11 5-8 17, Pat Jensen 5-9 0-0 13, KJ Rech 2-4 0-0 4.

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