The last time fans saw the Montana State University-Northern Lights at home was Oct. 17 and the season was just getting started. The next time Northern fans will see the Lights in the Armory Gymnasium will be this Friday night when they begin Frontier Conference play against Montana Tech.

In between, Northern was on the road for 10 different games, stretching over two months. But just before the Lights start league play, they got to kick off the new year with three home games in the AmericInn Classic at the Armory Gymnasium.

Friday night, the Lights beat Augustana-Alberta 81-57, then beat the Vikings 80-46 in a rematch Saturday afternoon. And finally, in a Sunday matinee, the Lights dismantled Crossroads College, the NCCAA defending national champion, 105-46.

In the three-game home sweep, Northern improved to 11-5 on the season, and more importantly, gained some much-needed momentum and confidence heading into league play.

Though all three games this weekend turned out to be blowouts, the home stand certainly didn't start that way. In fact, on Friday night, Augustana gave the Lights all they could handle in the first half. In a fast-paced half, the Lights saw the Vikings shoot better than 50 percent from the floor, and Augustana held a 31-30 lead with just minutes left in the period.

But from there, Northern finally broke free. Trevail Lee buried a 3-pointer, and senior Nicholas Blount closed out the half with a thunderous fast-break dunk that left the Lights leading 43-37 at intermission. The second half was more of the same. Blount opened the period with a triple, and Northern would go on a 17-0 run that put the Vikings away for good.

Warren Edmonson nailed three of the Lights’ 14 triples and scored a game-high 16 points. Corbin Pearson added 15 points, while freshman Brett Thompson gave the Lights a lift off the bench with 11 points and three treys.

In the rematch Saturday, Augustana again put up an early fight. But Northern didn’t take nearly as long to pull away. The Lights got a barrage of threes from Dylan Tatarka, Pat Jensen and Thompson, keying an 11-0 run. Then, Edmonson dropped in back-to-back treys to give the Lights a 40-22 lead at intermission.

Pearson then took off in the second. He scored eight points in the first five minutes of the second stanza as Northern grew its lead to 50-27, and from there, the Lights never looked back.

Edmonson led a balanced MSU-N attack with 14 points, while Pearson added 12 and Blount scored 10. Thompson and Jermaine Graves added another nine points each, while the Lights made 11 threes and shot 45 percent from the field.
"Augustana is a good basketball team," Huse Said. "They are much-improved from years past. They can shoot it well, and we have a lot of respect for them. They played us really tough.

"But, I thought our guys did a good job of adjusting," he continued. "Especially in the second half. On both ends of the floor, I felt like the guys turned it up a notch in the second half in those games. And we got a really solid lift from all of our bench guys."

And while Augustana put up a fight in both of its AmericInn Classic games against the Lights, there was no such resistance in Sunday's non-conference finale.

From the outset, Crossroads was completely overmatched. Northern outscored the Knights, who hail from Rochester, Minnesota, 26-0 in the first 11 minutes. The Knights' first point came on a free-throw, but Graves answered with a three to make the score 29-1. Crossroads finally got a field goal at the 8:22 mark of the first half, but the Lights would outscore the Knights 18-7 the rest of the way, and lead 49-12 at halftime.

The second half was more of the same. Crossroads did shoot much better, but so did the Lights, who bombed in 17 triples for the game. With 7:22 to play Graves and Lee combined for three straight treys, then, just minutes later, Thompson put on a clinic as he made three straight triples of his own, pushing Northern's lead to 99-32 with two minutes left in the game.

The Lights wound up shooting a sizzling 54 percent from the field and 52 percent from beyond the arc. They also out-rebounded the Knights 45-21. And despite scoring a season-high 105 points, the Lights were balanced. Lee scored 15 points, while Graves added 14. Thompson and Edmonson each chipped in with 13, while Blount, Robinson and Nikola Ivanovic added nine points each.

"We played really good basketball today," Huse said. "We played really well together, we shared the ball and we were very unselfish. And I was really pleased with how we played within ourselves. Sometimes, when games get lopsided, you tend to get a little sloppy, but we were really sharp and played with a lot of composure.

"This was the kind of play we wanted to see going into conference play," he continued. "So I was really pleased and proud of our guys for the way they played today."

And now, conference play is here. The Lights, who were picked to finish third in the Frontier this season, will begin league play with two games in the Armory Gymnasium. Northern will take on Montana Tech Friday at 8 p.m. and host No. 21 Lewis-Clark State Saturday night at 8 p.m.

Note: For a men’s full preview of the 2015 Frontier Conference, see Thursday’s Havre Daily News.

**Lights 81, Augustana 57**

**MSU-N** – Corbin Pearson 5-7 0-0 12, KJ Rech 1-4 5-6 7, Nicholas Blount 3-9 3-4 10, Warren Edmonson 5-12 3-4 14, Dylan Tatarka 2-2 2-2 6, Trevail Lee 2-3 2-2 7, Jermaine Graves 3-3 1-3 9, Brett Thompson 3-10 0-0 9, Damian Robinson 2-2 0-0 4, Pat Jensen 1-5 0-0 3, Nikola Ivanovic 0-3 0-0 0. Totals: 27-60 16-21 81.

Halftime: Northern 43-37. 3-pointers: 11-29 (Pearson 2, Blount 1, Edmonson 1, Lee 1, Graves 2, Thompson 3, Jensen 1); Rebounds: 28 (Edmonson 9); Fouls: 14; Fouled out: None.

**Lights 80, Augustana 46**

MSU-Northern freshman Brett Thompson drives around an Augustana defender during Friday night's game at the Armory Gymnasium. Thompson had a big weekend for the Lights.
**MSU-N** – Corbin Pearson 5=9 3-5 15, KJ Rech 1-1 1-1 3, Nicholas Blount 0-5 0-0 0, Jermaine Graves 3-5 1-2 9, Warren Edmonson 6-12 1-1 16, Trevail Lee 1-4 5-5 8, Dylan Tatarka 1-4 2-4 5, Brett Thompson 3-4 2-2 11, Damian Robinson 2-3 1-2 5, Pat Jensen 2-5 0-0 6, Nikola Ivanovic 1-3 0-0 1. Totals: 22-55 16-22.

Halftime: Northern 40-22. 3-pointers: 14-28 (Pearson 2, Graves 2, Edmonson 3, Lee 1, Tatarka 1, Thompson 3, Jensen 2); Rebounds: 31 (Robinson); Fouls: 13; Fouled out: None.

**Lights 105, Crossroads 45**

**MSU-N** – Corbin Pearson 3-7 1-2 7, KJ Rech 0-1 0-0 0, Nicholas Blount 4-12 0-0 9, Warren Edmonson 5-6 0-0 13, Dylan Tatarka 1-6 0-0 3, Trevail Lee 4-4 4-4 15, Jermaine Graves 5-6 0-0 14, Brett Thompson 5-7 0-0 13, Damian Robinson 2-3 5-9 9, Pat Jensen 5-11 2-2 13, Nikola Ivanovic 4-7 0-0 9. Totals: 38-70 12-17.

Halftime: Northern 49-12. 3-pointers: 17-33 (Blount 1, Edmonson 3, Tatarka 1, Lee 3, Graves 4, Thompson 3, Jensen 1, Ivanovic 1); Rebounds: 45 (Robinson 12); Fouls: 14; Fouled out: None.

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