Lights set to face Diggers, Warriors
By George Ferguson
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The Montana State University-Northern Lights have played a lot of good teams during the non-conference portion of their 2014-15 schedule. The Lights have played a lot of tough games, and most of them have been away from home. So there’s no question that the Lights should be well prepared for what they’re about to face.

Northern (11-5) opens Frontier Conference play with a pair of games in the Armory Gymnasium. The Lights host Montana Tech (9-5) tonight at 8, and then play host to No. 21 Lewis-Clark State (14-2) Saturday night at 8 p.m.

The games begin the road to the Frontier championship, something Northern hopes to be in the hunt for when late February rolls around. And though the Lights return just two starters from last year’s team, which went 11-5 and finished second in league play, veteran head coach Shawn Huse feels his team has come a long way and is ready for the rigors of the Frontier.

“We’re not far off from where we were at this point last season,” Huse said. “I feel really good about where we’re at right now. We might have a few more L’s than we did last year, but we’ve played the toughest non-conference schedule we’ve ever had here. And that’s going to have us well prepared for what we’ll see in our league.”

Being prepared is good, but with league play set to begin, the Lights will also need to be sharp, and they certainly looked that way in their three wins at the AmericInn Classic last weekend. Still, Northern’s new core of talented players will now have to adjust to life in the Frontier.

Senior Corbin Pearson, who leads the Lights at 14 points and six rebounds per game, along with fellow senior Jesse Vaughan are MSU-N’s returning starters from last conference season. Senior Nicholas Blount, who averages nine points per game, also has experience in league play, as does Damian Robinson, but much of the rest of Northern’s lineup will be playing their first conference game tonight.

The Lights are getting 13 and 11 points, respectively from newcomers Trevail Lee and Warren Edmonson, while Jermaine Graves adds eight per night. Senior Pat Jensen has also come on strong this season, and will be called upon to step up even more as conference plays gets going, as will newcomer KJ Rech. As a team, the Lights enter the Frontier season scoring 75 points per game and allowing 65. Northern is once again one of the top 3-point shooting teams in the NAIA, as the Lights shoot 44 percent from beyond the arc and have made 158 bombs so far this season.

But again, the Lights will look to be even better as they try to contend for yet another Frontier title and look to rack up Huse’s ninth straight 20-win season.

That journey starts tonight against Montana Tech.
The Orediggers have finished near the bottom of the Frontier for several seasons now, but they enter league play looking like anything but a cellar dweller. Tech has one of the most dynamic players in the Frontier in 6-7 swingman Adam Greger. The four-year starter averages 18 points and seven rebounds per game, and his outside-in game is extremely difficult to stop. Greger has help, too. Tech is a veteran team, led by the senior backcourt of Antonio Snow (6-2) and Brandon Rydberg (6-3), who combine to average 20 points per game. And inside, the Orediggers are big. Paul Engstrom (6-7) and Marcus Payne (6-5) give the Orediggers size, strength and balance on the interior.

Tech’s talent and experience, combined with its frustrating style of play, makes the Orediggers a very dangerous opponent. The Diggers, who average 75 points per game, are always a deliberate and patient offense, and they love to wear a defense down as the game goes on.

“Tech is going to be as tough as anybody in this league,” said Huse, who was a Frontier MVP and NAIA All-American in his playing days at Tech. “They have a go-to guy in Greger, but they also have weapons around him. They are an experienced team that has been together for a while now. So we understand that they are a really good basketball team, and we’re going to have to play very well on our home floor.”

As talented as Tech is, Saturday night’s opponent, the Lewis-Clark State Warriors, might just be one of the most talented teams in the NAIA, at least with its starting five. The Warriors, who put up 95 points per game through non-league play added, three NCAA Division I transfers to their roster this season, led by 6-8 sophomore Eric Diouf, who averages 14 points and eight rebounds per game. Also added to the LCSC lineup were University of Montana transfers Jake Wiley (6-6) and Nick Emerson (6-5), and with 6-7 Jamaal Thomas returning, the Warriors have one of the biggest lineups in the NAIA, and that more than makes up for the loss of All-American P.J. Bolton, the Warriors’ leading scorer the past two seasons.

And with so much size and athleticism, and a great leader in shooting guard Brady Bagby, the Warriors and head coach Brandon Rinta won’t be just a huge test for the Lights Saturday night, but they might just be the team to beat in the Frontier this season.

“When you look at what they’ve done this season, it’s easy to see they’re a very good team,” Huse said of the Warriors. “They have some new faces, but those guys are all very good players. They have a lot of size on the inside, but they also have a ton of quickness. This is a team that has a lot of scoring ability, and we’re going to have to be up to the task of trying to slow them down.

“But that’s the case with both teams this weekend,” Huse continued. “And with pretty much every game you play in this league. This league is so tough. There will be no easy nights for anyone, and especially defensively, you’re going to have to play really well to have success.”

Northern will begin its run to try and claim the Frontier title tonight when Montana Tech visits the Armory at 8. The game between the Lights and LCSC tips off at 8 p.m. Saturday. The Warriors are in Great Falls to open league play tonight. The Lights will travel to Carroll College next Thursday and Rocky Mountain College next Saturday.

**Lights (11-5) vs Montana Tech (9-5)**

**Tonight at 8 p.m.; vs No. 21 LC State (14-2) Saturday at 8 p.m. at the Armory Gymnasium in Havre, MT**

**MSU-Northern Starters**
G Trevail Lee, 5-9, Jr, 11 ppg  
G Nick Blount, 6-3, Sr, 9 ppg  
F Warren Edmonson, 6-2, Jr., 13 ppg  
F Corbin Pearson, 6-6, Sr., 14 ppg  
F KJ Rech, 6-5, Jr, 3 rpg  

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