Lights left heartbroken at home
Northern men stunned by Warriors, Orediggers in the Armory Gymnasium
By George Ferguson
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If a losing to the Montana Tech Orediggers in the armory gymnasium for the first time in over a decade was a bitter pill for the Montana state university-northern men's basketball team to swallow, it was nothing compared to how the lights felt in the locker room a mere 24 hours later.

Northern suffered a gut-wrenching 80-76 defeat at the hands of the no. 21 Lewis-Clark state warriors Saturday night in the armory, and it was a loss the lights thought they prevented — not once, but twice.

Behind a herculean effort from junior point guard Trevail Lee, it looked as though the lights had sent the game into overtime, and were even going to have a chance to win with just 1.5 seconds left in what was a wild finish. Lee had already buried a 3-pointer to cut the warriors’ lead to 76-75 with just :14 left. But LCSC went back up three after Tre Thomas calmly sank two free throws in front of a raucous MSU-N crowd.

Things went bezerk from there. With eight ticks left, the Lights needed a three to tie, but 6-7 University of Montana transfer Jake Wiley stole the MSU-N inbounds pass and all looked lost. But, Wiley missed two free throws after being fouled, and the ball ended up in Lee’s hands with just five seconds left. Lee raced down the floor and launched a wild, 40-foot shot into the air as he was being fouled and the ball went in, causing the entire Armory to rise to a deafening roar. However, the basket was waived off, and the foul called was done so before the shot, according to the officials. So, instead of Lee going to the foul line with a chance to put the Lights ahead by one point, he was given two shots with Northern still down three points with 1.5 seconds left.

Lee sank the first shot, which gave him a game-high 32 points, but he needed to miss the second on purpose. And a play that almost never works in basketball, seemed to work perfectly, as Lee missed to the left and Damian Robinson swooped in for a putback before the buzzer sounded. Again, the Northern crowd exploded and the game appeared headed to overtime. However, Robinson's basket was waived off as the officials determined that Lee’s foul shot never touched the rim. The result was a dead ball, and possession to the Warriors, who wound up making two free throws, while sending Northern to its second straight loss on the opening weekend of Frontier Conference play.

“First, give credit to LC (State),” said Northern head coach Shawn Huse. “They found ways to win the game, they made the plays they had to. They’re a very good basketball team. But I’m very, very proud of our guys. I respect the fight in them. They never quit. I’m very proud of them tonight.

“And I thought we executed great at the finish there,” he continued. “We made some amazing plays to give ourselves a chance, and it’s very disappointing that both of those plays got waived off. That’s a really hard way to lose a game.”
Hard doesn’t describe it. In the blink of an eye, Northern thought it had least sent the game to overtime, and with plays that seemed to almost never work in the game of basketball. But, at the end of the day, neither counted, and the Lights were left devastated.

“Not to take anything away from LC, but I also thought we did some things to shoot ourselves in the foot at key moments of the game,” Huse said. “We just made too many mistakes that cost us. I thought we played a great first half, and with Corbin (Pearson) in foul trouble for most of it. But I’m very disappointed in the start of the second half. We again blew a halftime lead that we had worked hard for and played well to get. We have to stop doing that. So while I’m really proud of the way we battled, there are some things that we did that really hurt us.”

The game was a gritty battle from the start, and the Lights did well to hang with the much-bigger Warriors, who play four different players at 6-7 or bigger. After an early Nick Blount three, the Lights looked to be in control, but an LCSC triple gave the Warriors a 21-18 lead with 6:38 left in the half. From there, Northern fought hard. Lee made two driving layups and Blount buried another trey, while Dylan Tatarka gave MSU-N key minutes off the bench. And the Lights wrestled the lead away for good when Lee made a running layup at the buzzer, sending Northern into halftime with a 33-32 edge.

“Yes, we were at a size disadvantage, but I thought we defended really well in the post,” Huse said. “KJ Rech made a bunch of phenomenal defensive plays, and he did it logging heavy minutes because we were in foul trouble pretty much right from the start. So I thought we did a great job defending them for a good portion of the game.”

The first half was a seesaw affair, but the Lights watched their slim lead evaporate as LCSC scored 11 of the first 14 points in the second half. And after nine straight points by star guard Brady Bagby, the Warriors were in front 49-40 with 14 minutes to go.

But, as Huse said, the Lights didn’t quit. Pearson, who would eventually foul out, drilled a big triple, and Lee followed with one of his own to pull the Lights to within one at 51-50. The game would remain tight much of the rest of the way, as both teams hit big shot after big shot. Jesse Vaughan nailed a trey to keep things close with 8:07 to go, and Lee was unstoppable down the stretch. But the Warriors once again seemed to take control when they went on a 9-0 run which included another Bagby three off a missed free throw. And after Wiley capped the run with a hook shot, the Lights found themselves down 73-65 with 1:44 to play.

However, Northern wouldn’t go quietly as Rech hit two clutch free throws to start the comeback, and Lee made three of his own, before hitting his huge trey to get the Lights back within one. And that set up the controversial and dramatic finish.

“Hats off to Tre (Lee),” Huse said. “He had an All-American type night tonight. He just refused to give in, even when things got tough. I thought we got some great contributions from our bench, and again, our guys never quit. They battled hard, and I’m so proud of them for that.”

Lee’s career night included an 11-of-16 performance from the floor, four triples and a 6-of-8 outing from the foul line. Blount and Tatarka each finished with 10 points. Northern also shot 10-of-19 from beyond the arc, while the Lights held LCSC to just three bombs. And while the MSU-N defense held the Warriors to 15 points under their season average, the Lights couldn’t slow them down completely. Bagby poured in 20, while Wiley added 18 and nine boards. LCSC also out-rebounded the Lights 40-25 and went a staggering 31-of-40 from the charity stripe.

Diggers get a rare win in Havre

While Northern was crushed after Saturday night’s loss, the weekend didn’t start well either. In Friday night’s Frontier Conference opener in the Armory, the Lights saw a halftime lead go away as Montana Tech knocked off Northern 76-67.

It was Tech’s first win in the Armory in its last 15 tries.

“Credit Tech,” Huse said. “They hit all the shots they needed, and they hit them when they needed them most. And down the stretch, we didn’t. We really struggled shooting the ball, and that was pretty much the difference.”
Indeed. The Lights shot just 23 percent from the floor in the second stanza, and that proved to be their undoing — and it came after Northern worked so hard to grab a 37-32 halftime lead.

Northern got that lead by rallying late in the first half. A Damian Robinson dunk gave the Lights some early momentum, but the Orediggers were ahead 27-21 with six minutes left. A Jermaine Graves 3-ball cut into the Tech lead, then the Lights finished the half on a 10-2 run with some great free-throw shooting.

"I was proud of our guys," Huse said. "Because I thought they came in ready to go. They were focused and prepared. And they played hard. But it's disappointing to be up at the half, and then watch it go away like it did, and pretty quickly. Still, even with that, we had some chances to win down the stretch, we just made some mistakes and didn't make enough plays at the end of the game."

The halftime lead did disappear in a hurry. Tech got treys from Antonio Snow and Adam Greger, and eventually, the Orediggers ripped off a 10-1 run and led 49-40. At the same time, the Lights went through a brutal scoring drought. They didn't hit their first field goal of the half until Nick Blount nailed a shot at the 12:12 mark. But even then, Snow made another triple, and that's the way it went for the Lights the rest of the way.

Tech seemed to have an answer for everything the Lights did, and the Orediggers’ lead would eventually grow to 68-56 with 4:31 to play. Trevail Lee would cut the lead back to seven with a trey, and the Lights had two good looks at threes that would have cut the Tech lead down even further inside the two-minute mark. But neither fell, and the Orediggers were able to put the game away at the foul line.

Blount paced the Lights with 17 points, while Warren Edmonson scored 13. However, MSU-N made just six 3-pointers and shot just 35 percent from the floor. And the Lights had no answer for the Tech duo of Snow and Greger. Snow finished with a game-high 19 points, while Greger added 18, as Tech wound up 2-0 on the weekend after beating the University of Great Falls Saturday night in Great Falls.

Meanwhile, the Lights are off to a disappointing 0-2 start to Frontier play, and they fell to 11-7 overall. And while things won't get any easier as Northern strikes out on the road this week to face Carroll College Thursday night and Rocky Mountain College Saturday night, Huse said his team must be resilient.

"The bottom line is, in this league, a lot of teams are going to beat up on each other," Huse said. "And there's a long way to go. We just have to bounce back and keep fighting."

**Montana Tech 76, Lights 67**

**TECH** – Antonio Snow 6-14 4-6 19, Brandon Rydberg 2-3 0-1 4, Chase Haack 3-6 3-6 9, Adam Greger 7-14 4-5 18, Paul Engstrom 4-5 2-2 10, Reid Baerlocher 2-3 0-0 4, Trent Thompson 2-2 2-2 4, Flemming Okeke 2-2 0-0 4, Marcus Payne 1-3 0-0 2. Totals: 29-52 8-15 76.

**MSU-N** – Corbin Pearson 2-7 2-2 6, KJ Rech 1-1 0-0 2, Trevail Lee 1-9 6-7 9, Nicholas Blount 4-8 9-10 17, Warren Edmonson 3-7 5-6 13, Jermaine Graves 1-4 3-5 6, Dylan Tatarka 1-1 2-4 5, Damian Robinson 1-3 3-5 5, Jesse Vaughan 1-2 1-1 4, Pat Jensen 0-0 0-0 0. Totals: 15-42 31-40 67.

Halftime: Northern 37-32. 3-pointers: TECH 3-8 (Snow 3), MSU-N 6-15 (Lee 1, Edmonson 2, Graves 1, Tatarka 1, Vaughan 1); Rebounds: TECH 32 (Greger 8), MSU-N 22 (5 players with 3 each); Fouls: TECH 26, MSU-N 21; Fouled out: None; Technical Fouls: MSU-N Coach, 6:56, 1st.
Lewis-Clark State 80, Lights 76

LCSC – Erick Diouf 3-6 3-5 9, Jake Wiley 6-12 6-9 18, Trea Thomas 0-1 4-4 4, Brady Bagby 4-8 10-12 20, Nick Emerson 3-6 0-0 6, Rick Tesmer 3-6 0-0 6, Gavin Kauffman 2-4 2-2 7, Cammie Lewis 1-3 4-4 6, Jamaal Thomas 1-3 2-2 4. Totals: 23-51 31-40 80.

MSU-N – Corbin Pearson 1-3 3-4 6, KJ Rech 1-4 2-2 4, Trevail Lee 11-16 6-8 32, Nick Blount 4-5 0-1 10, Warren Edmonson 1-6 2-2 5, Jermaine Graves 2-3 1-2 6, Dylan Tatarka 4-6 2-3 10, Damian Robinson 0-1 0-2 0, Jesse Vaughan 1-4 0-2 3, Pat Jensen 0-1 0-0 0, Nikola Ivanovic 0-0 0-0 0. Totals: 25-49 16-28 76.

Halftime: Northern 33-32. 3-pointers: LCSC 3-11 (Bagby 2, Kauffman 1), MSU-N 10-19 (Pearson 1, Lee 4, Blount 2, Edmonson 1, Graves 1, Vaughan 1); Rebounds: LCSC 40 (Wiley 9), MSU-N 25 (Rech 5); Fouls: LCSC 21, MSU-N 26; Fouled out: Pearson, Vaughan.

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