Lights out for some road redemption
Streaking MSU-N men get rematches with Warriors tonight, Orediggers Saturday
By George Ferguson
February 5, 2015

The first half of the Frontier Conference season was two different tales for the Montana State University-Northern men's basketball team. First came a four-game losing streak - a rare occurrence for the dominant MSU-N program.

Now however, the Lights start the second half of the Frontier season with a three-game winning streak. And they're looking more and more like the team everyone has grown accustomed to seeing over the years.

The Lights (3-4, 15-9) will look to keep that streak going when they visit Lewis-Clark State tonight and Montana Tech Saturday night. The road swing is the first of two difficult road trips left on Northern's schedule, and MSU-N head coach Shawn Huse feels his team is ready for what it will face this weekend.

"I feel we are a much different, much improved team from four weekends ago," Huse said. "I am very proud of our guys for learning on the job, especially after some tough early conference losses. Now we just need to keep that mentality of getting better each practice, film session, and game, and if we do that, anything can happen, just as we have seen so many times in this league."

Four weeks ago, the Lights were stunned by Tech and LC State on the opening weekend of Frontier play. In particular, the Lights were devastated in a controversial ending to their narrow 80-76 loss at the hands of the Warriors in Havre.

But as Huse mentioned, the Lights look like a completely different team now. Northern is trending upward on defense, and the Lights are coming off a spectacular 60-58 road win at UGF last Saturday night in which leading scorers Warren Edmonson and Corbin Pearson clinched the game with late free throws.

However, as much momentum as Northern has, the Warriors (3-4, 17-6) won't be a pushover tonight. LCSC has been up and down since its opening weekend win in Havre, but there's no denying the Warriors' immense talent. Senior shooter Brady Bagby and 6-7 forward Jake Wiley each average 15 points per game, while Wiley is a beast in the paint on both ends of the floor. 6-8 center Eric Diouf averages another 13 points per game while Nic Emerson chips in with 10. LCSC also has a deep bench, with seven more players averaging between five and nine points per game.

"We know we have to step up our inside game if we are going to turn the tides on them (Warriors) this time," Huse said. "The combination of their athleticism, size and guard play makes them as tough as anyone we have gone against in Frontier play. We know it is going to be another challenging conference game, but I think our guys are excited for it."

The Lights will no doubt be excited given how things ended the last time the two rivals met. Northern's Trevail Lee, who averages 13 points per game, appeared to have made a game-tying 3-pointer while being...
fouled in the final seconds, but that bucket was waved off, and seconds later, another game-tying basket by Damian Robinson was also waved off, leaving MSU-N on the short-end of a gut-wrenching loss.

But tonight's game isn't the only redemption game on Northern's slate this weekend. Saturday, the Lights will look to avenge a season-opening 76-67 loss at the hands of Montana Tech (4-3, 13-8). Since that rare win in Havre, Tech's first in a decade, the Orediggers have been up and down, and they come into this weekend's series with the Lights and Argos on a two-game losing streak, just like LCSC does.

Nevertheless, Northern knows first-hand how good the Orediggers can be. Tech, led by 6-7 senior guard Adam Greger and his 17 points per game, shot 55 percent from the field in the first meeting last month in Havre, and with a front line that includes 6-7 Paul Engstrom, the Orediggers badly out-rebounded the Lights. Northern's improving defense must also account for senior guard Antonio Snow, who averages 14 points per night, and scored a game-high 19 points in Tech's win in the Armory Gymnasium last month.

"Tech has a good team, that can really shoot the ball," Huse said. "They caught fire in the second half up here last time. We need to do a much better job defensively if we are going to slow them down."

And defense is where the Lights are making hay right now. Northern held UGF to just 31 percent shooting last Saturday, and in its last three games, all wins, MSU-N is holding opponents to just 39 percent shooting from the field and just 27 percent from the 3-point-line. And if the Lights can continue that trend this weekend, they can also continue their steady climb up the Frontier Conference standings.

Tonight's game between Northern and Lewis-Clark State will tip off at 8:30 M.S.T. in Lewiston, Idaho. Saturday game between MSU-N and Tech tips off at 5:30 p.m. in Butte. Northern returns home to host Rocky Mountain College and Carroll College next weekend.

Havre Daily News website