There has been very little about that Frontier Conference season that’s come easy for the Montana State University-Northern men’s basketball team. And, back in front of their home fans this weekend, the Lights made their two-game home stand look both easy, and extremely difficult.

Friday night, Northern jumped all over the Rocky Mountain College Battlin’ Bears, and, in a 78-64 win which pulled the Lights all the way back to .500 in the conference standings, even when the going got a little rough, the Lights didn’t let up.

Northern used an 18-4 start to Friday night’s game inside the Armory Gymnasium to propel itself to a crucial Frontier win over the Bears, who beat MSU-N 66-56 back in January in Billings. The Lights shot a blistering 10-of-18 from the 3-point-line, while shooting a red-hot 52 percent from the floor. in tough times, and that’s what we did tonight.”

“The first 10 minutes were big,” said junior Warren Edmonson, who was one of four Lights to land in double figures. “We came out tonight with the mind-set that we were going to get it done on defense. No matter how our offense was going, we were going to get after it right away on D. And we did that, and from there, we got it rolling. I think, when they (Bears) made their little run on us, we did it again too. We got the stops we needed and we got it going again on offense from there.”

Defense was a big key, as the Bears came in averaging a whopping 85 points per game. But, when the Lights needed it, the offense was there too, and MSU-N head coach Shawn Huse noted that while Northern always hangs its hat on the defensive end of the floor, it’s nice to see the shots fall with consistency, like they did Friday night.

“We like to say our defense fuels us,” Huse said. “But the shots were falling for us tonight, and honestly, I felt like our offense gave us some added defensive energy. And I think with how well we shot the ball, that maybe stymied Rocky’s offense a little bit more too.”

And RMC did appear stymied from the opening tip. An early triple from Nick Blount, and back-to-back trey’s by Edmonson sparked an 11-0 MSU-N run. And when Corbin Pearson drilled one of his own at the 14:06 mark of the first half, the Lights were out in front 18-4. In all, the Lights wound end up burying six triples on the Bears in the first 20 minutes, as Blount nailed two more, and Pearson added 14 first-half points, giving Northern a 37-21 lead at intermission.

“I’m really proud of our guys for their focus tonight,” Huse said. “We got off to a great start, and with a team like Rocky, that’s so big because when they get going offensively, they’re really tough to slow down. You saw that with how quickly they cut the lead to eight points in the second half. But I thought our guys were just really focused and determined, and even when things got a little rough, they responded.”

Northern did have to answer one big Bear charge in the second stanza.
With Trevail Lee, Edmonson and Pearson all knocking down 3-point shots in the first seven minutes of the second, the Lights found themselves leading 54-34 with 11:05 to go. From there, the Bears rallied as Tyree Anderson, Malachi Roberts and Sian Lane all made bombs to spark a 13-2 RMC run. And with just 5:11 to play, it was a game again at 59-51.

However, after Lane buried a triple to cut the lead to eight, Anderson was called for an intentional foul on KJ Rech, and that changed the momentum once again. Rech made the free throws, then Edmonson scored on an inbounds play. And seconds later, Rech would make a bucket in the paint to cap a 10-0 run, and in less than a minute, the Lights had gone from up eight to up 18, and the game was all but over.

"I think we're getting better all the time," Huse said. "And that was really evident tonight. We've lost some big leads in games this season, but our guys weren't letting that happen tonight. They responded to Rocky's run really nicely, and that really shows how much we've grown as a basketball team."

Pearson had a big game for the Lights, scoring 24 points and grabbing eight rebounds. He was a stellar 8-for-9 from the field and 2-for-2 from long range. Edmonson also nailed three bombs, as did Blount, who, along with Lee, scored 13 points. Rech added eight points and five board, while the Bears got a team-high 20 from Anderson.

“This one was important,” said Edmonson, who hails from Portland, Oregon. "When you have two big games like we do this weekend, it’s always big to win that first one, because you don’t want to go into a big game coming off a loss. So this win tonight gives us the push and the drive we need going into another big game.”

**Marched On**

That second big game for the MSU-Northern Lights came in the form of a showdown with the Carroll College Fighting Saints Saturday night in the Armory Gymnasium.

And for a Few minutes, it looked like Northern’s momentum from Friday night’s win was carrying right over into Saturday’s rematch with the Saints, who beat the Lights in overtime last month in Helena.

Warren Edmonson, Nicholas Blount and Trevail Lee all buried 3-pointers to stake the Lights to an 11-3 lead in the first four minutes. But, as hot as Northern shot the ball to start, the Lights went out quickly, and the Saints wound up winning their first game in Havre in nearly a decade, 60-58.

“It’s a tough one for sure, because we did play so well against Rocky,” MSU-N head coach Shawn Huse said. "It was a game that we just never seemed to get into a rhythm in offensively. It was very choppy, and it was just tough to get into any sort of a groove tonight.”

The first 20 minutes were more than choppy, they were downright slow, as the Lights and Saints were whistled for a combined 26 fouls. And that allowed Carroll to not only get back into the game, but overtake it, as the Saints marched to the foul line over and over, in what became 16-0 run. A late 3-pointer by Pat Jensen narrowed the gap for Northern, but by the time a first stanza that took nearly an hour to complete was in the books, the Lights trailed 33-25 and had shot just 21 percent from the floor while Carroll had gone 15-of-16 from the charity stripe.

“I thought we shot ourselves in the foot a lot, in both halves really,” Huse said. "We made a lot of mental mistakes, and for much of the night, it seemed like our bodies were out there but our brains weren’t.

“Having said that, you have to give Carroll a lot of credit,” he added. “They came in here ready. They defended and played really hard, and they forced us into a hole that was pretty tough to dig out of.”

And the Lights did find themselves in a hole.

Northern played much better in the second stanza, as Corbin Pearson sparked a 12-0 MSU-N run which brought the Lights back to within one. And just minutes later, Nicholas Blount and Lee went back-to-back from downtown, and the Lights were in front 45-43 with 8:48 to go.

From there, the game see-sawed for a moment, but Carroll would find its groove again and go on a 9-2 run to lead 54-49 with 4:25 left. The lead would remain at four points until a great drive by Pearson resulted in
an old-fashioned 3-point play, bringing the Lights to within one at 56-55 with :55 left, and the Armory crowd roaring to its feet.

However, as fast as Pearson ignited the crowd, Carroll’s Ryan Imhoff silenced it as he answered Pearson’s heroics with a trey with :30 left, putting the Saints ahead 59-55. Northern did have a last gasp as Edmonson answered the call with a three of his own to pull back within one at 59-58, and the Lights’ chances got even better when Zach Taylor missed a free throw with :09 left. From there, Northern had the ball trailing by two, but Lee’s attempt at a game-winning three with three seconds left was blocked by Imhoff, and the Saints escaped the Armory with a rare win, while dropping the Lights back to 5-6 in Frontier play.

In the bitter loss, Pearson scored 17 points and grabbed five boards, while Blount added 13 and Edmonson hit three bombs for nine points. Carroll got a game-high 20 points and seven rebounds from Oliver Carr before he fouled out.

Now, Northern (16-11), which shot 33 percent for the game, but did defend the Saints well, must try to rally with two huge road challenges coming up. The Lights have a rematch with nationally ranked UM-Western Thursday night in Dillon, and a showdown with the Westminster Griffins Saturday in Salt Lake City.

“It was a tough one to lose tonight,” Huse said. “Carroll played really well, but I thought, again, we just shot ourselves in the foot too many times. I thought we executed pretty well in the second half, and we got some looks we wanted. I thought we defended pretty well too. But we just didn’t do those things when we absolutely had too.

“But our guys played with a lot of heart and character,” he added. “That’s never, ever an issue with this team. They fought hard and never gave up, even when things weren’t going our way at all. And I know they’ll go back to work this week, and work hard to get ready to go again next weekend.”

**Lights are 5-6 in Frontier, 16-11 overall; Next Up: at Western Thursday**

**Lights 78, Rocky Mountain 64**

**RMC** – Rob Nyby 0-8 0-0 0, Ben Moerkerke 0-2 0-2 0, Sian Lane 5-11 0-0 13, Tyree Anderson 8-15 2-5 20, Malachi Roberts 4-8 4-4 12, Derek Graves 1-1 0-0 3, Chad Kananen 3-3 0-0 8, Taylor Longo 2-8 2-3 7, Zach Hinton 1-3 0-0 2. Totals: 23-60 8-16 64.

**MSU-N** – Corbin Pearson 8-9 6-9 24, K.J. Rech 3-5 2-2 8, Trevail Lee 4-15 4-4 13, Nicholas Blount 4-5 2-3 14, Jermaine Graves 1-2 1-2 4, Dylan Tatarka 0-1 0-0 0, Brett Thompson 1-1 0-0 2, Damian Robinson 0-3 0-0 0, Pat Jensen 0-1 0-0 0, Nikola Ivanovic 0-0 0-0 0. Totals: 26-51 16-23 78.

Halftime: Northern 37-21. 3-pointers: RMC 8-19 (Lane 3, Anderson 2, Graves 1, Kananen 1, Longo 1), MSU-N 10-18 (Pearson 2, Lee 1, Blount 3, Edmonson 3, Graves 1); Rebounds: RMC 23 (Roberts 5), MSU-N 35 (Pearson 8); Fouls: RMC 23, MSU-N 15. Fouled out: None.

**Carroll 60, Lights 58**

**CC** – Jake Hollifield 3-4 3-3 9, Oliver Carr 7-10 6-7 20, Zayn Kirkendoll 2-5 1-1 5, Zach Taylor 3-14 3-4 9, Ryan Imhoff 2-4 1-1 6, Ian Lorang 0-0 0-0, Franco da Silveria 1-2 2-2 4, Lorel Johnson 0-1 0-0 0, Nick Williams 0-0 0-2 2, Alejandro Santos Piquerias 1-2 2-2 4. Totals: 19-42 21-24 60.

Montana State University-Northern's Nick Blount, left, tries to scoop a shot during Saturday night's game between the Lights and Carroll College in the Armory Gymnasium. Carroll's win Saturday night gave the Lights a home split.
**MSU-N** – Corbin Pearson 5-9 7-9 17, K.J. Rech 1-2 2-3 4, Trevail Lee 2-10 0-0 6, Nicholas Blount 2-8 7-10 13, Warren Edmonson 3-6 0-0 9, Dylan Tatarka 0-0 4-4 4, Brett Thompson 0-0 0-0 0, Damian Robinson 0-2 1-2 1, Pat Jensen 1-4 1-2 4, Nikola Ivanovic 0-0 0-0 0. Totals: 14-42 22-30 58.

Halftime: Carroll 33-25. 3-pointers: CC 1-2 (Imhoff 1), MSU-N 8-17 (Lee 2, Blount 2, Edmonson 3, Jensen 1); Rebounds: CC 25 (Carr 7), MSU-N 25 (Pearson 5, Robinson 5); Fouls: CC 26, MSU-N 19; Fouled out: Carr.

*Havre Daily News website*