Lights brace for huge battle with Argos
By George Ferguson
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The Montana State University-Northern men’s basketball team never has a problem getting up to play the University of Great Falls Argos. After all, it’s as intense a rivalry as there is in the Frontier Conference.

But when you add to the rivalry by throwing in senior night at the Armory Gymnasium, and the fact that both teams are playing for their Frontier playoff lives, the game then takes on a whole new meaning.

And that’s exactly what will happen when the Lights (6-7, 17-12) and the Argos (6-7, 17-10) meet at 8 p.m. inside the Armory Gymnasium Saturday night. The Lights will honor seniors Corbin Pearson, Nicholas Blount, Pat Jensen and Damian Robinson before Saturday night’s game, which could determine who makes the Frontier playoffs and who doesn’t.

But before the Lights and Argos do battle on the court, Northern will officially say goodbye to its seniors. All four have meant a great deal to the Lights in their time at MSU-N, but especially Pearson, who will likely be playing his final game in the Armory after spending the last five years at MSU-N. The Big Sandy native has been a fan favorite from day one, and he’s also been one of the Lights’ emotional leaders for years now. A team captain this season, Pearson is a two-time All-Conference performer and is averaging 13 points and seven rebounds per game in his final season as a Light.

And while Pearson’s night will be emotional, it will be that way for all of the Lights who will be playing their final game in Havre.

Jensen, too, has spent the last four years at MSU-N after coming to Havre from Missoula. The 6-7 standout has been the consummate team and role player for the Lights, and in his senior season, that role has increased dramatically. He’s become one of Northern’s most important reserves this season, and his clutch 3-point shooting has been something the Lights have grown to count on in conference play. Like Pearson, Jensen has also been a fan favorite at MSU-N and will be sorely missed when his playing days are over.

Blount and Robinson transferred to Northern a year ago, and both have been integral parts of the Lights’ success since. Blount really began to blossom when he led Northern in scoring in its NAIA national tournament game in Kansas City last spring. As a senior, he’s stepped into a starting role, and is averaging nine points and four assists per game. The Pittsburgh, California-native has also made 44 3-pointers this season, which is third on the team. Robinson, who came to the Lights from Bakersfield, California, had an injury-plagued junior campaign, but he’s come on strong this winter. Another key role player for the Lights, Robinson averages five points and four rebounds per night, and his defensive toughness, his rebounding and his highlight reel dunks have become a spark the Lights count on.
“It seems every year it gets tougher and tougher to say goodbye to our seniors,” MSU-N head coach Shawn Huse said. “This group is absolutely no exception. They have provided great leadership both on and off the court. They have lead us to so many big wins in so many big games. They’ve all helped us get to and play in at least two national tournaments. I can’t say enough good things about them. They will be missed and I am happy for them as they are all very close to earning their degrees and moving into the next phase in their lives.”

But before the Northern seniors can move into that next phase, they and the Lights have work to do, and it’s all on the line against the Argos, who Northern bested 60-58 last month in Great Falls. The game between UGF and MSU-N could be an elimination game as far as the playoffs are concerned, depending on what happens with the games both Montana Tech and Westminster have to play this weekend. Both teams could also still get in regardless of Saturday night’s outcome, but it won’t be a sure thing, so the game is of the utmost importance to both bitter rivals.

“Well everyone knows this is an important game on many levels,” Huse exclaimed.

Defense will be the key to Saturday night’s game. The Lights and Argos are two of the top defensive teams in the Frontier, and that showed true in their first meeting. But shooting will also be a big factor. Northern is the top 3-point shooting team in the conference, while UGF is one of the top teams in the league in regards to field goal percentage.

Offensively, the Lights will rely on Pearson, as well as the sharp shooting of Blount, Warren Edmonson and Trevail Lee, while the Argos are led by Marcus Hurn’s (5-11) 14 points per game, and T.J. Harris (5-8) and Sigman Farmer III (6-6), who combine to score another 22 per night. Farmer is also one of the top rebounders in the conference, while UGF’s depth will come into play as well. Head coach Anthony Owens will go 10-deep on his bench, and players like Matthew Hurn (6-0), Sergio Berkley (6-3) and Daniel Arcau (6-9) will be called upon to give the Argos a spark in front of what should be a hostile Armory Gymnasium crowd. UGF comes in averaging 75 points per game, and the Argos are one of the top rebounding teams in the Frontier.

“Great Falls has proved all year long that they can beat anybody,” Huse said. “I thought we played a really good game against them last time, but they didn't go away, in fact they grabbed the lead from us late in the game. It took a great effort to fight back and win. We know we need to shore up some things on defense in order to play them as well or better this time.”

With so much riding on Saturday night’s game, expect both teams to play well. The Argos were once a team looking to win a Frontier title, but have lost five straight. And they certainly don't want to fall all the way out of the playoffs. Northern on the other hand, has won six of its last nine, and broke a two-game losing streak in a dramatic win at Westminster last Saturday night.

So, with an already intense rivalry between the Lights and Argos renewing on the final night of the regular season, and the emotions of senior night coming into play, Saturday night’s game, which tips off at 8 p.m. inside the Armory Gymnasium, has all the makings of an epic showdown.

Lights (6-7, 17-12) vs Great Falls Argos (6-7, 17-10) Saturday at 8 p.m. at the Armory Gymnasium in Havre, MT

MSU-Northern Starters
G Trevail Lee, 5-9, Jr., 12 ppg
G Nick Blount, 6-3, Sr., 9 ppg
F Warren Edmonson, 6-2, Jr., 13 ppg
F Corbin Pearson, 6-6, Sr., 13 ppg, 7 rpg
F KJ Rech, 6-5, Jr., 5 ppg, 5 rpg

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