

Off and running: Skylights win twice in Great Falls

(Created: Monday, August 24, 2009 12:19 PM MDT)

George Ferguson Havre Daily News sports editor gferguson@havredailynews.com

It's not even September yet, and the NAIA volleyball season is just one weekend old. So there's no telling just how good or how far the Montana State University-Northern volleyball team is going to go this season. But if the Skylight's season-opening matches at the University of Great Falls Preseason Tournament is any indication, the best is yet to come for Northern. After losing in three straight games to the No. 3 team in NAIA on Thursday to open their season, the Skylights reeled off two impressive wins over strong NAIA schools. On Friday, Northern defeated Minot State University in four games, by scores of 25-23, 25-18, 19-25 and 25-21 for its first win of the young season. Then, on Saturday, the Skylights closed out their weekend with an impressive straight set win over Hope International University by scores of 25-21, 25-19 and 25-21. "After playing an opponent like Cal Baptist on Friday, who we really played with and played close for the first two games, I couldn't be more pleased with how we came out and played the next two days," first-year MSU-N head coach Bill Huebsch said. "I wasn't disappointed at all with how we played on Thursday, and the great thing is, we came out and improved the next two days and that's our goal right now. We just want to keep getting better each and every day, and we did that this weekend, and to pick up two wins against good opponents this early in the season, I don't think the weekend could have gone much better. I was really pleased and excited for the girls." Against Minot State, and then again against Hope International, Huebsch said his team improved in their serving and passing from Thursday night's match and those were both key factors in MSU-N's two wins. Individually, the Skylights got a strong performance against Minot from Kaylee Bossert, who racked up 12 kills, 21 digs and two blocks. Brittany Baker and Paige Richardson combined for 21 more kills for Northern, while Jordan Merrill dished out 25 assists. MSU-N totaled 74 digs in the match and had 12 aces, including four from Baker. On Saturday against Hope International, Baker came up big again with 10 kills and three blocks, while Bossert added three aces and 10 digs and Nahe Keanaaina totaled 31 assists. The two wins equal Northern's wins total from a year ago, but more importantly, Huebsch said, it was a big confidence booster heading into the next portion of MSU-N's schedule. "I think its really big for us to go to Great Falls, and not only win twice, but to really play well," Huebsch said. "We improved each match, we eliminated some mistakes from the previous match and we just got better each time out. The girls are really excited right now, and I think this really will do a lot for us as the season goes on." MSU-N is back on the road with matches Friday and Saturday at the College of Southern Idaho Tournament.