

Skylights look sharp in Maroon/Gold Scrimmage

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Wednesday, August 17th, 2011

The Montana State University-Northern volleyball team is two days away from its season-opening tournament in Great Falls.

And the Skylights used Tuesday night as one last chance to get in some live match experience before they start playing for real.

The enthusiasm was high and there was an air of excitement as Northern conducted its annual Maroon/Gold Scrimmage Tuesday night at the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse. The scrimmage was a three-game match with players switching teams throughout the night. And at the end, the home team, led by third-year head coach Bill Huebsch outscored the visitors, coached by assistant Tamika Jarvis by scores of 18-25, 25-14 and 25-16. But again, certain players rotated between teams, and the scores weren't as important to Huebsch as how his new-look squad played and executed.

"I was really pleased overall," Huebsch said. "We started a little slow, I didn't think our energy level was where it needed to be to start. So we called a time out and reminded the girls why we're here and what we want to accomplish. And after that, as the match went, I thought we improved. I thought our level of play got better and better as the night went on."

No stats were kept, but almost every Northern player had solid moments in the scrimmage. And that includes the seven new faces who have joined the MSU-N team this season. Huebsch said he was most happy with the team's hitting, its serve-receive and some in-game adjustments made on defense throughout the night.

"Collectively, I thought we hit the ball hard out of our system and I thought we hit the ball smart. We didn't make a lot of errors which was really good to see," he said. "I thought Kelsey (Williams), Sierra (Diehl), Paige (Richardson), Victoria (Polo) and Sam (Hutcheson) all made some really nice swings. I was pleased with our net play in the middle. With how we blocked the ball.

"Offensively, I thought Nahe (Keenaaina) did a really good job of distributing, she made some smart decisions and passed the ball really well tonight," he added. "And I thought Holly (Cartwright), Karyssa (Bowron) and Dayna (Jensen) really did a good job on defense. They all had some really nice digs. But really, I can't single out one player. I thought every player that played tonight contributed and made some good plays out there. I thought our depth and athleticism really showed up in this scrimmage, like it has in all of our practice this year. So that was exciting."

While the scrimmage went well, the Skylights will play for real on Friday with two matches at the UGF/Carroll Tournament in Great Falls. And while Huebsch was pleased with how his live scrimmage progressed on Tuesday night, he says his team is looking forward to playing real matches against top-notch competition.

"I definitely think we got what we needed out of the scrimmage," he said. "I'm really pleased with what I saw and how far we've come since we started practicing, especially with so many new faces on this team. I really liked our chemistry on the floor tonight, and I think the scrimmage showed how well this team is bonding together.

"And we're just really excited to get the season started," he added. "We're excited about going down to Great Falls and finding out where we are and what we need to do from there."

Notes: Skylight senior Tasha Dyrland, a former North Star High School standout didn't compete in Tuesday night's scrimmage due to an injury. Northern has eight new players on its 2011 roster. The Skylights open the season on Friday against nationally-ranked Indiana Wesleyan at 3 p.m. in Great Falls. MSU-N also faces Dickinson State at 5 p.m. on Friday. For an in-depth look at the 2011 MSU-N volleyball team, see Thursday's Havre Daily News.