

Rocky sweeps Skylights

George Ferguson

Sunday, October 2nd, 2011

With one loss on the weekend, and a three-game losing streak in tow, the MSU-Northern volleyball team was looking for a bounce-back match.

Instead, the Skylights ran into a buzz saw in the form of the No. 11 Rocky Mountain College Battlin' Bears. The Bears raced past the Skylights in a three-game sweep by scores of 25-16, 25-22 and 25-17 Saturday afternoon at the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse in Havre. The loss dropped Northern to 3-4 in the Frontier Conference and 11-8 overall. In just two weeks, MSU-N has fallen from first place to a fifth in the Frontier.

"It's a little disappointing that we couldn't find a way to play better at home this weekend," MSU-N head coach Bill Huebsch said. "At times, we played well in both matches this weekend, but we just made too many mistakes and had too many unforced errors, and against teams like Rocky and Carroll, you just can't do that. They are too good and they really make you pay for your mistakes."

And Rocky did just that to the Skylights on Saturday.

In three sets, the Bears trailed just twice, they out-hit Northern 0.350 to .183 and had seven more kills. The Bears also out-blocked the Skylights 9-4, had six aces and seven more digs.

"We pretty much got beat in every statistical category today," Huebsch said. "But again, a lot of that was us making errors at really critical times in the match. Rocky is a very good team, there's a reason they are ranked where they are, and they came here and played a great match. But we know we're capable of playing much better than we did, especially in those critical points in the match."

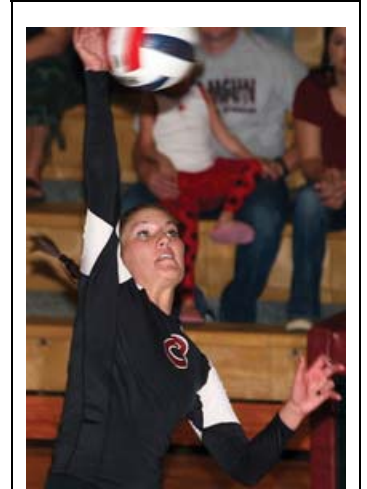
The Skylights started strong and put the first-place Bears on their heels early on. Northern led 9-5 in the first set after a Kelsey Williams kill capped off an 8-1 run. But the Bears dug in and clawed their way back, ripping off an 11-1 run of their own to lead 22-13. From there, they cruised to a first-set win.

Rocky kept the momentum in the second set, leading 18-13 midway through. But Northern showed resiliency. The Skylights battled back via a 6-0 run with three kills from Williams and three by Hillary Isleifson. Isleifson's last smash knotted the set at 20-20 but a block by Rocky's Ashley Welborn sparked the Bears to a 3-point win.

The Bears then went for the kill, leading the Skylights 18-10 in the third set and again coasting to a victory and a sweep in the match.

"I thought we did a great job in coming back in the second set," Huebsch said. "I thought Ashley Lawson and Samantha Hutcheson gave us a nice spark. But even in that comeback, unforced errors really hurt us. We just couldn't get over the hump today."

Williams led Northern with 13 kills and eight digs. Isleifson had nine kills, one ace, 16 assists one block and seven digs, while Hutcheson totaled six kills. Nahe Keanaaina had 16 assists, Holly Cartwright and Lynnsie Togiaj had 10 digs each and Victoria Polo had one solo block. Welborn led the Bears with 13 kills and two blocks.



Northern's Kelsey Williams spikes a ball during a Frontier Conference volleyball match between the Skylights and Rocky Mountain College Saturday afternoon in Havre.

With the home losses to Carroll and Rocky, Northern now sits in fifth place heading into the Frontier's bye week. The Skylights also have just two home matches left and five of their last seven on the road.

"Maybe this week off will be a good thing," Huebsch said. "It might give us a chance to reevaluate some things, to really focus in on correcting some things and to give us a chance to try and get back to playing the volleyball we were playing two weeks ago.

After the week off, MSU-N returns to action on Oct. 15 at UM-Western and Oct. 16 at Montana Tech. The Skylights have just two home matches left this season.

Rocky Mountain def. MSU-Northern

25-16, 25-22, 25-17

RMC — Kills 45 (Ashley Welborn 13, Jillian Bates 10), Assists 43 (Kristin Barott 34), Aces 6 (Michaela Hale 2, Welborn 2), Digs 50 (Jamie Ellenbaas 11), Blocks 9 (Welborn 2).

MSU-N — Kills 38 (Kelsey Williams 13, Hillary Isleifson 9), Assists 36 (Nahe Kaenaaina 16, Isleifson 16), Aces 3 (three with one each), Digs 43 (Holly Cartwright 10, Lynnsie Togiai 10), Blocks 4 (three with one each).