

Northern spikers earn a road sweep

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The Montana State University-Northern volleyball team was ready to get back into the win column. And the Skylights did just that, and in impressive fashion on the road.

Northern snapped a four-match losing streak by sweeping the UM-Western Bulldogs Friday night in Dillon, then the Skylights put the wraps on an impressive road trip by beating Montana Tech in four games Saturday afternoon in Butte.

The wins put the Skylights back over .500 in Frontier Conference play at 4-3 heading into this week's rivalry match at UGF.

"Any time you win on the road in this conference, it's a big bonus," Northern head coach Bill Huebsch said. "And it was really good for us to be able to get that winning feeling back and start a new streak. To win two on the road this weekend really puts us in a good spot right now, so I'm proud of the kids for going down there and being able to come home with two wins."

Huebsch said the Skylights may have had some rust from their bye week as they fell behind Western in each of the first two sets Friday night. But in each of those sets, MSU-N didn't panic, instead the Skylights settled into the match and wound up walking away with a sweep by scores of 25-21, 25-20 and 25-18.

Hillary Isleifson led the way for Northern with 10 kills, while Holly Cartwright had 12 digs. Northern also had four team blocks.

"I think the layoff, not playing matches for a while affected us a little on Friday night," Huebsch said. "Not to mention, Western is just a much better team this year and they have improved since we played them in Havre. They gave us a really tough match. But to our kids credit, they didn't panic or get down when we fell behind early. They did a really good job of battling back."

And the Skylights did the same Saturday in Butte. Northern dropped the first set against last-place Tech, but then won three in a row to take the match by scores of 23-25, 25-16, 25-17 and 25-20.

Isleifson again led the way with a match-high 14 kills. The Skylights also made some adjustments and wound up with eight blocks, including two each from Kelsey Williams, Sierra Diehl and Victoria Polo. Cartwright had another great match, totaling 23 digs, while Diehl and Lynnsie Togiai each had an ace.

"I've said that everyone in this league has improved throughout the season and that includes Montana Tech," Huebsch said. "They came out ready to play us and got that first set. But again, there was no panic by our kids, they didn't get down. Instead, we made some changes to what we were doing to counter what they were doing to us and it worked out. Our kids ended playing really well the rest of the way."

"I was really pleased with both wins," he added. "We have a lot to work on and a lot of room for improvement. But from the first serve Friday night to the last point on Saturday, I felt like we got better. And with two road wins, that's all you can ask."

The Skylights also jumped over some big hurdles with the wins over Western and Montana Tech. MSU-N already equaled its conference win total from a year ago, and at 13-8 overall, Northern surpassed its total wins from last season. MSU-N is tied for fourth in the Frontier with UGF heading into the huge rematch between the two teams Friday night in Great Falls.

"To achieve those little milestones like we did this weekend, it shows we're making progress," Huebsch said. "I think it shows we're getting better and we're not done yet. We are going to keep moving forward."

**MSU-Northern def. Western
25-21, 25-20, 25-18**

MSU-N - Kills: 36 (Hillary Isleifson 10). Assists: 30 (Nahe Keanaaina 29). Aces: 2 (Ashley Lawson, Samantha Hutcheson 1). Digs: 40 (Holly Cartwright 12). Blocks: 4.

UM-W - Kills: 36 (Susanne Rehse 9, Bailey Branson 8). Assists: 34 (Paige Latimer 32). Aces: 4 (Branson 2). Digs: 39 (Shelby Mack 17). Blocks: 3 (Rehse 2.5).

**MSU-Northern def. Montana Tech
23-25, 25-16, 25-17, 25-20**

MSU-N - Kills: 49 (Hillary Isleifson 14). Assists: 45 (Nahe Keanaaina 26). Aces: 2 (Sierra Diehl, Lynnsie Togia). Digs: 80 (Holly Cartwright 23). Blocks: 8 (Victoria Polo 2, Kelsey Williams 2, Diehl 2).

MT - Kills: 45 (Shersteen Cline 20). Assists: 42 (Kiara Ross 21). Aces: 3 (Allyse Cruise 2). Digs: 79 (Cruise 30). Blocks: 5 (Lacey Phelan 2, Emily Lobnitz 2).