

Payback: Skylights beat DSU at the buzzer

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When it comes to your all-time pay backs, even Steven Spielberg couldn't have scripted what the Montana State University-Northern women's basketball team did to the Dickinson State Blue Hawks on Friday night. Exactly seven days removed from losing to DSU on a last-second 3-pointer in Dickinson, N.D., Skylight junior guard Taylor Keller returned the favor. Keller sank a 25-foot three as time expired lifting the Skylights to a 68-67 victory over the Blue Hawks Friday night at the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse. "It felt awesome," the 5-7 Keller from Custer said after her game-winning shot. "It's actually an overwhelming feeling, to help your team win an important game with a shot like that. But I just knew in the timeout, even before they (DSU) scored to go ahead that we were going to win this game. We just had a really confident feeling about it. And it's ironic too, because of the way they beat us last week." Trailing the Blue Hawks for much of the night, MSU-N's defense found itself in a position to win or force overtime with under 15 seconds left in regulation. Keller had made a game-tying bucket with 1:14 left, and with the game still knotted up at 65-65, DSU's Kia Herbel, nearly unstoppable all night, appeared to put MSU-N on the ropes as she scored to put the Blue Hawks ahead 67-65 with :07 left to play. But Northern got the ball in Keller's hands, and with nothing but open hardwood in front of her, she raced down the court and let a long shot go as the buzzer sounded, giving the Skylights their first win of the season, as well as their first victory over the Blue Hawks in their last five meetings. "After they (DSU) scored, we had options available to us with how much time was left," head coach Chris Mouat said. "We thought about a timeout to try and work a last shot out of the half court, but once Taylor got the ball back, I saw no one was in front of her so we opted to just let her go. We rolled the dice and let her pop one and she made a huge shot. It was a deep shot, but I don't think we would have gotten a better look, even with a timeout. "It was a big shot by Taylor, but that's the kind of player she is, she's a coaches daughter so she understands the game, she understands situations really well," he added. "She was very composed, and she went down and made a great play. It was a huge confidence boost for this team and for our program." A confidence boost indeed. The Skylights had started the season 0-3, losing to Azusa Pacific, DSU and Minot State by a combined 11 points. Then came Friday night's battle, which early on, turned out to be the Herbel show. The 6-2 NAIA Division II All-American scored 12 of DSU's first 16 points, giving the Blue Hawks a 37-31 lead at halftime. Herbel wound up going 13-of-14 from the field for a game-high 27 points to go along with her 11 rebounds. But it was Mouat's halftime adjustment on defense, as well as the willingness of the MSU-N players to keep fighting that allowed the Skylights to stay in the game and be in a position to win at the end. In the second half, Mouat went to a zone defense, fronting Herbel on both sides and it temporarily slowed her down. In the meantime, MSU-N went on a 10-2 run midway through the final stanza, as Keller, Samm Schermele, Laramie Schwenke and Awilda Hernandez all made big shots to help MSU-N climb back into the game. On defense, Zivile Gaizutyte and Laci Keller went to work in the paint, slowing Herbel down just enough to give Northern a chance at the end. "It was risky going to the zone because they (DSU) have such great perimeter players," Mouat said. "And while Herbel was next to impossible to stop, it did work for a period in the second half, and thankfully, they never got hot on us from the outside. We committed to that defense and it worked out for us. Credit to our kids for hanging in there too. One thing we've learned about ourselves as a team so far this year is there is no quit in this group. They keep playing all the way to the end." MSU-N held Herbel to 10 points in the final 20 minutes and it turned out to be a key difference in the game as the Blue Hawks made just three three's on the night. Offensively, the Skylights got a balanced attack, led by Schermele with 14 points and Taylor Keller's 12. Gaizutyte had her third double-double of the season, scoring 13 points and grabbing 12 rebounds, while Hernandez scored 10 points and hit two of MSU-N's five trey's. Schwenke added eight points, four assists and two steals while her former Malta teammate, Kelly Pankratz gave the Blue Hawks 13 points off the bench. "This was a big win for us," Mouat said. "Dickinson is a really, really good team, all the way around. But I thought everyone who played for us tonight brought something to the table. Awilda and Laramie made big shots for us, and Samm had an outstanding game. Z (Gaizutyte) did a good job inside and Laci Keller came in and made some big plays for us. And of course, Taylor's shot was huge. This win just gives us a big lift as we get ready to go back out on the road now." The Skylights (1-3) will be back in

action at a tournament in Great Falls this weekend. MSU-N faces top-ranked Vanguard University on Friday night and Southern Oregon on Saturday afternoon.