Skylights split with NAIA powers
George Ferguson, Havre Daily News sports editor
Monday, December 6th, 2010

The Montana State University-Northern women's basketball team knew it had its work cut out heading into two games at the Westminster Tournament in Salt Lake City.

And not having won since the beginning of November, and without their leading scorer on Saturday afternoon, the Skylights responded.

On day after losing to GSAC power the Master's College, where point guard Taylor Keller suffered an injury that kept her out of Saturday's game, the Skylights rose up and found a way to get back in the win column, beating William Jessup, 82-68.

“We played a complete 40 minutes for the first time in a while,” MSU-N head coach Chris Mouat said. "Laramie (Schwenke) and Samm (Schermele) shared the point spot and did a good job. We out rebounded them and shot better from the three and from the field. And I thought our post play was also a huge positive.”

The Skylights powered their way to a 42-30 halftime lead, and for the game, made nine 3-pointers to win going away.

MSU-N shot better than 55 percent from the field and won the rebound battle 33-24 — something the Skylights have struggled with at times this season.

Northern also got a balanced scoring effort in the absence of Keller. Schermele poured in a game-high 17 points, going 4-of-6 from the floor, 3-of-4 from three and 6-of-7 from the free-throw-line. She also grabbed six rebounds and dished out five assists. Courtney Blue was big in the post for Northern, scoring 14 points, while Schwenke added 13 points and seven assists, also connecting on two three's. Val Gee chipped in with a season-high 12 points, while Jordan Bruursema scored nine and Nicole Wilk added nine points and six assists.

The Skylights weren't as fortunate in Friday's 72-54 loss to the Mustangs. MSU-N played a solid first half, trailing just 36-30 but lost Keller for the rest of the game near the end of the first stanza, and the Mustangs outscored Northern 36-24 the rest of the way.

"We got down 14 early and really battled back," Mouat said. "We Had a shot to tie it late in the first half. Taylor got hurt on the last play of the half and we went the rest of the weekend without her. Nicole Wilk had a great floor game for us with 9 assists and we beat them on the boards which had been a big focus for us. We simply did not shoot it well, especially from the three and they defend very well and we turned it over far too much for the game. We battled and played hard but have to generate more offense to beat a top flight team like The Masters."

In the loss to the Mustangs, Bruursema picked up the slack with an outstanding 14 points and five boards. Schwenke scored 13 points and Schermele added nine, but the Skylights went just 4-of-17 from beyond the arc and had 22 turnovers to just 18 assists.

In the end, MSU-N salvaged a much-needed road split against two quality NAIA teams, and the Skylights now stand at 4-6 heading into a 12-day break.

Northern will return to the floor on Dec. 16 when the Skylights host Frontier rival UGF in a nonconference game.