Skylights open league play with Argos
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Friday, January 7th, 2011

The long-awaited Frontier Conference women’s basketball season is finally here. And there’s noting like a little rivalry game to kick things off.

Tonight in Great Falls, the MSU-Northern Skylights will open league play with a visit to rival UGF. And in an unusual scheduling year, the two teams already know each other well.

Last month in Havre, the Skylights blew out the Argos in a nonconference game. And while UGF comes into tonight’s game with just five wins on the season, Northern head coach Chris Mouat is expecting nothing less than a battle with the Argos.

“The Great Falls game is an important one, because it’s our next game on the schedule and the first of the conference season,” Mouat said. “Plus, they are playing well. We were able to watch them in Las Vegas and they had a good tournament. They will be very ready for us at their gym and we will need to be sharp at both ends to get the job done.”

Of course the Skylights aren’t coming into tonight’s matchup with UGF playing poorly. Northern has won five of its last six games and finished the nonconference season at 9-7. And the Skylights have been doing it without senior guard Taylor Keller, who’s been sidelined with a knee injury for nearly a month now.

Without Keller in the backcourt, the Skylights must pick up the slack with newcomers Monica Hollowell, Nicole Wilk and Kylee Denham. The bulk of MSU-N’s scoring comes from guards Samm Schermele and Laramie Schwenke, while forwards Jordan Bruursema, Courtney Blume and Val Gee have also been playing consistent as of late.

And while the Skylights buried the Argos 86-70 last month, the Argos aren’t without firepower of their own. Like Schermele for the Skylights, the Argos are led by a pair of former Great Falls High prep stars in guard Kezia Ford and 6-0 forward Marissa Skogen. The duo combine to score 21 points per game and they share in the rebounding duties for the Argos. Freshman guard Sara Sciacia and senior forward Jamie Young also give the Argos more scoring and rebounding, and when UGF shoots the ball well from the outside, the Argos are tough to stop.

So like in most games in the Frontier, the Skylights must play their trademark tough, physical defense, and they must limit the Argos in transition.

“Kezia Ford had some huge games in Las Vegas and is giving them bigger numbers all of the time, but she has a very capable group of scorers around her,” Mouat said. “They are playing extremely hard and with a purpose, and it will take a great effort to get the job done. They can hurt you at all five spots and on different nights have had a lot of kids lead them in scoring. They are very strong from the 3-point line and can be a very dangerous offensive rebounding team. Slowing them down offensively, limiting turnovers, and winning on the boards will be major keys for us. They will show us a lot of different defenses and we’ll need to be ready for all of them.”

And while Mouat knows his team must plat at a high level tonight in order to get conference play started with a win, he also likes how much his team has grown in recent weeks, and feels good about where the Skylights are at as January begins.

“This group has responded to a lot, especially given the number of new players on the floor on a given night,” Mouat said. “They are learning more and more about themselves all of the time and I think our
best basketball is still ahead of us. Our leadership has been outstanding and the chemistry of this team is as good as any we've had."

Tonight’s game between UGF and MSU-N tips off at 6 p.m. at McLaughlin Center in Great Falls. The game can be heard locally on 92.5 KPQX FM.

The Skylights play their first three conference games of the year on the road. Northern doesn't play at home again until Jan. 21-22 against Carroll and Rocky.