Their backs were against the wall. Their season was hanging by a thread. And they were playing a nationally-ranked arch rival in the midst of a difficult three-game losing streak. Yet the Montana State University-Northern Skylights didn’t flinch.

In easily their most dominating performance of the season, the Skylights shocked the No. 25 Carroll College Fighting Saints 68-49 Friday night at the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse, in what was the start to an impressive weekend.

“This win gives us a lot of momentum, a lot of confidence,” Northern senior Samm Schermele, who moved into fifth on the Northern all-time scoring list said. “When you’re losing, when you lose the last three games like we did, it’s tough. It’s draining. So to come back here and beat a team like Carroll, who is a very good team, and beat them the way we did tonight, it really opens our eyes to the fact that when we play as well as we’re capable of, we can beat anybody.”

And the Skylights certainly played like a team capable of beating anyone on any give night.

Schermele and teammate Courtney Blume combined to score 38 points, doing it inside and out, and together, the Skylight defense stymied one of the best 3-point shooting teams in the country. The Skylights swarming defense held the Saints to just a 4-for-20 performance from the 3-point-line and a 36 percent shooting night from the field.

And while MSU-N’s defense has been playing well all season, the Skylights fed off that intensity offensively. They shot 54 percent from the floor and went a remarkable 20-of-22 from the foul line, including a perfect free-throw performance in the second half.

“That’s the thing I’m really proud of these kids for,” head coach Chris Mouat said. “We played well with a lead. Our defensive effort was there, to hold Carroll to the shooting night they had, when they are such a good shooting team is a tremendous effort by our kids. And yes, we finally made some shots. But it’s what we did with a lead that I’m most proud of them for. We took care of the ball, we executed down the stretch, we made our free throws and ultimately, we did the things we had to do to never let Carroll back in the game.”

Without question. The Skylights took a 12-11 lead at the 11:08 mark in the first half, and that shot by Schermele ultimately proved to be the game-winner as the Saints never led again. Schermele drilled a three with just six seconds left in the first half to give MSU-N a 32-25 lead at intermission, then MSU-N outscored the Saints 17-5 to start the second stanza and the route was on.

Northern’s final 10 minutes of basketball against the Saints was perhaps its best in a ling time. Kylee Denham nailed a triple to put the Skylights up 13 with eight minutes to play, and from there, Carroll basically kept putting MSU-N on the foul line, and the Skylights didn’t falter, putting the Saints away for good.

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Schermele finished with 19 points and four assists, while Blume added 19 points on 8-of-12 shooting to go along with three rebounds. But the win over the Saints was a total team effort. Laramie Schwenke added nine points, five rebounds, three assists and a steal, all the while playing great defense on a number of Carroll’s star guards. Jordan Bruursema added five points and five rebounds as the Skylights won the all-important rebounding battle. Alysha Green paced the Saints with 16 points, but made just four shots from the field.
"That was big," Mouat said. "To win on the boards is something we’ve been struggling with, and rightly so because we are undersized. But it just goes to show the heart and effort our kids played with. I’m really proud of the effort and the passion we played with tonight.

“And we did get contributions from everybody,” he added. “Whether it was defensively, or passing the ball, or making free throws, everybody stepped up and did something really important for us, and that’s what it takes to beat a good team like Carroll. So it was a great win for our team and one we really needed.”

With the win over Carroll, and Saturday night’s thrashing of Rocky Mountain College, the Skylights improved to 2-3 in the Frontier Conference, but more importantly, now have something to build on going forward. And they put the start to their conference season behind them.

“It’s a big win, a big accomplishment for our team,” Schermele said. “I think it just shows us, if we didn’t know it already, that we can be a very good team and we can play with anybody. It gives us some good momentum now for the rest of the season.”

Skylights 68, Carroll 49

CC — Jakie Mee 0-3 0-0 0, Nancy Johnson 1-3 0-0 2, Jeni Guertin 1-2 1-2 3, Jordan Bagley 1-2 0-0 2, Cassie Scheffelmaier 3-6 0-0 7, Jill Jagelski 2-11 0-0 4, Sara Meyer 5-7 3-3 13, Torrie Cahill 0-0 0-0 0, Jessica Van Dyke 1-6 0-1 2, Alex Dunn 0-0 0-0 0, Alysha Green 5-12 3-4 16. Totals 19-52 7-10 49.

MSU-N — Laramie Schwenke 1-5 7-8 9, Kylee Denham 2-3 0-0 6, Samm Schermele 5-9 8-8 19, Valerie Gee 2-2 2-2 6, Jordan Bruursema 2-4 0-0 5, Nicole Wilk 2-4 0-0 4, Courtney Blume 8-12 3-4 19, Monica Hollowell 0-2 0-0 0, Stren Tramelli 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 22-41 20-22 68.