Skylights run over Lady Argos

George Ferguson, Havre Daily News sports editor

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The Montana State University-Northern women’s basketball team has faced injury problems all year long. And in a game the Skylights had to have, they were again two players down.

But instead of faltering, the Skylights again showed why they are tough to beat on their home floor as they raced past the University of Great Falls 77-45 Saturday night at the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse.

The win avenged a road loss at UGF last month and also moved Northern to 3-5 in the Frontier Conference. And perhaps more importantly, it marked the return of senior point guard Taylor Keller, who’s missed nearly two months with a knee injury.

“We played well at home and I think the difference between tonight and the last time we played UGF was, everybody came ready to defend our home court tonight,” Keller said. “Everybody stepped up. We played really tough defense, we made shots and we rebounded the ball. UGF is a great team, they are explosive offensively, but we had everybody step up tonight and we played very well as a team.”

Fittingly, Keller opened the game with a 3-pointer. The last time she played was against Great Falls back in early December, but her three on Saturday night sparked a 16-0 start for the Skylights, a start that UGF never recovered from.

“It was great to see Taylor knock down that shot, a shot she’d been waiting nearly two months to take,” Northern head coach Chris Mouat said. “I think the start to the game was key. We really came out ready to play, and when you get off to a start like we did, it’s a great advantage, and we capitalized on it.”

UGF made a push late in the first half to narrow the gap to 24-14, but the Skylights were clicking on both ends of the floor. They led 33-19 at halftime, and after back-to-back three’s by Laramie Schwenke and Samm Schermele midway through the second half, the Skylights led 49-29 and the game was all but over.

“The big thing for us is making shots and rebounding,” Mouat said. “And I thought we did a real good job at both tonight. We know we’re going to play good defense every night, but we made shots tonight. We executed well and we battled hard on the boards.”

Schermele poured in a game-high 23 points and four 3-pointers, while Courtney Blume added 15 points and Schwenke totaled 14 points and a game-high 11 rebounds. Val Gee, who got the start for the injured Jordan Bruursema chipped in with 11 points, while Keller added eight points and two threes in her comeback game. The Skylights shot 48 percent from the floor, outrebounded the Argos 36-32 and committed a season-low three turnovers.

“I’m really proud of our team,” Mouat said. “We were two players short, we were playing a very good UGF team, a team who beat us pretty good at their place, and we really stepped up tonight. Everybody came ready to play, and I’m just very proud of the whole team right now.”

The Skylights (12-12) are trying to take advantage of five of their last seven games at home, and are hoping to position themselves for a good spot in the Frontier’s postseason. And Saturday night was a good start.
“We feel like we have a lot left to play for,” Keller said. “We know we can play well at home and with all of the home games we have left, we feel like we have a good chance to end up finishing really strong. So we definitely have a lot left to play for.”

The Skylights continue their home stand next weekend with games against UM-Western and Montana Tech.

**Skylights back in business**

**Skylights 77, UGF 45**

**UGF** — Marissa Skogen 5-13 1-2 11, Katie Wright 1-2 0-2 2, Shorty Ramos 2-4 0-0 5, Kara Peterson 0-0 0-0 0, Sigourney Thompson 0-1 0-0 0, Chelsea Adams 0-2 0-0 0, Kezia Ford 1-6 2-2 5, Sarah Sciascia 2-5 2-2 6, Jamie Young 5-14 1-2 12, Donica Chrest 0-2 0-0 0, Aline Lino 2-4 0-0 4. Totals 18-53 6-10 45.

**MSU-N** — Laramie Schwenke 5-13 3-3 14, Taylor Keller 3-8 0-0 8, Kylee Denham 0-1 2-2 2, Samm Schermle 8-15 4-4 23, Valerie Gee 4-7 3-4 11, Nicole Wilk 1-3 0-0 2, Courtney Blume 5-9 5-6 15, Stren Tramelli 1-1 0-0 2. Totals 27-57 17-19 77.