Skylights win three in Calgary
George Ferguson
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A three-game road trip against three teams from the upper tier of Canadian women’s college basketball was going to be tough. But the young and short-handed Montana State University-Northern women’s basketball team answered the call this weekend in Calgary.

The Skylights played three games in three days at the Mount Royal Tournament in Calgary, going a perfect 3-0. Northern beat rival Lethbridge 73-46 on Friday night, Mount Royal 67-60 on Saturday night and the University of British Columbia-Okanagen 68-60 on Sunday afternoon.

“It was really, really tough competition for us,” Northern head coach Chris Mouat said. “Every game was a real battle, but those last two games in particular were really a fight for our team.

“We were short-handed, playing in a really different environment with the FIBA rules and against three really good teams. So I can’t say enough about the job our kids did this weekend. They really pulled together and every player who stepped on the floor for us had a hand in these wins. Every kid did a great job and without all of them, we wouldn’t have won all three games. So it was a lot of fun for us and it was really nice to see is continually find ways to pull out wins up there.”

Northern’s most lopsided win came against perhaps the most formidable opponent. The Lethbridge Pronghorns always play the Skylights tough, but MSU-N came out and played a great game, especially defensively. The Skylights led 32-26 at halftime but pulled away with a 27-9 run in the third quarter. Northern’s defense turned the Horns’ over a whopping 36 times.

“I thought our energy and effort was really good in all three games,” Mouat said. “And I was really pleased with the way we defended, especially against Lethbridge who is a very talented offensive team. But I thought we defended well in all three games, and we forced some good teams to turn the ball over a lot.”

Nikki Tresch paced the Skylights with 15 points, while Kylee Denham added 14. Freshman Rachelle Bennett and junior Jordan Bruursema added nine points each.

The Skylights were already playing this weekend without starters Laramie Schwenke and Laci Keller, and they lost Denham early in the Saturday’s win over Mount Royal. Still, Northern responded with yet another gutty performance, including 21 from Tresch and 16 from Bruursema. Bennett had another nice game as well, scoring 13 points. Bruursema was also a perfect 3-for-3 from the 3-point-line to go along with eight rebounds and Kelly Millager also grabbed eight boards.

“Not only did we defend well, but I thought we rebounded really well in all three games,” Mouat said. “And those things are really important keys for us. We have to do those things well on a nightly basis and we did that in Canada.

“Jordan Bruursema was really big for us, especially in the last two games,” Mouat added. “She kept hitting really clutch shots for us. Nikki Tresch was also fantastic every night for us. And really, the entire team was. I can’t say enough about the effort and contributions we got from every single one of our players this weekend.”

Bruursema scorched the nets in Sunday’s thrilling win over Okanagen. She scored 24 points, including a 6-for-7 performance from beyond the arc. Tresch chipped in with 14 points, Millager scored 11 and
freshman Taylor Cummings, who played well in all three games, added 10 points as the Skylights improved to 4-0 on the season.

“These were all great challenges for our team,” Mouat said. “We were able to find ways to beat three really solid teams and that’s going to certainly help us get better as we go along. I’m just really proud of the effort by all of our kids.”

The Skylights are back on their home floor on Thursday night for a rematch with Lethbridge. The game is slated to tip off at 5:30 p.m.

**Skylights 73, Lethbridge 46**

MSU-N — Nikki Tresch 4-13 5-6 15, Kylee Denham 4-12 4-6 14, Rachelle Bennett 3-12 3-4 9, Taylor Cummings 4-13 1-3 9, Jordan Bruursema 3-4 0-0 9, Leah Olson 1-3 0-1 2, Micah Kirkpatrick 1-3 2-2 5, Kelly Millager 2-4 0-0 4, Michela Howe-Cobb 3-3 0-0 6. Totals: 25-67 15-22 73.

Halftime: 32-26 MSU-N; 3-point field goals: 8-21 (Tresch 2-6, Denham 2,-4, Bruursema 3-3, Kirkpatrick 1-1); Rebounds: 32 (Cummings 7); Assists: 12 (Tresch 5); Fouls: 16; Fouled out: None.

**Skylights 67, Mount Royal 60**

MSU-N — Nikki Tresch 6-12 5-6 21, Kylee Denham 0-2 0-0 0, Rachelle Bennett 4-8 4-4 13, Taylor Cummings 1-3 3-4 5, Jordan Bruursema 5-12 3-4 16, Leah Olson 0-0 0-0 0, Micah Kirkpatrick 1-4 0-0 2, Kelly Millager 3-5 2-4 8, Michela Howe-Cobb 1-2 0-0 2. Totals: 21-48 17-22 67.

Halftime: 25-24 Mount Royal; 3-point field goals: 8-14 (Tresch 4-6, Cummings 1-1, Bruursema 3-5); Rebounds: 40 (Bruursema 8, Millager 8); Assists: 8 (Cummings 4); Fouls: 14; Fouled out: None.

**Skylights 68, Okanagen 60**

MSU-N — Nikki Tresch 4-17 4-4 14, Rachelle Bennett 3-7 3-4 9, Taylor Cummings 2-3 2-5 10, Jordan Bruursema 7-12 4-5 24, Kelly Millager 3-7 5-11 11, Leah Olson 0-3 0-0 0, Micah Kirkpatrick 0-3 0-0 0, Micheala Howe-Cobb 0-1 0-0 0. Totals: 19-53 21-32 68.

Halftime: 31-19 MSU-N; 3-point field goals 9-19 (Tresch 2-4, Cummings 1-2, Bruursema 6-7); Rebounds: 40 (Bennett 9); Assists 12 (Tresch 5); Fouls: 17; Fouled out: None.