Despite beating the University of Lethbridge by a wide margin last Friday night in Calgary, Montana State University-Northern women’s basketball coach Chris Mouat knew things were going to be different the second time around.

And Mouat was right on, as the Pronghorns gave Northern everything they had Thursday night at the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse. Still, the Skylights pulled off a gutty 54-51 win over Lethbridge to improve to 5-0 on the season.

“We knew tonight was going to be a brawl,” Mouat said. “They (Pronghorns are just too good of a team not to come in here and give us a battle and that’s exactly what we got tonight. We were nowhere near at our best in most aspects, but we found a way to win and I’m proud of the kids for that.

“We got a great effort tonight from everyone who played, and frankly if we wouldn’t have had that effort, we would have lost,” he added. “So I’m just really proud of the kids for finding a way to get a win.”

The Skylights got off to a difficult start with Lethbridge racing out to a quick 7-2 lead. In that stretch, Northern didn’t make its first field goal until almost five minutes in. But two 3-pointers by junior Jordan Bruursema seemed to spark the Northern offense, and after an 8-0 run, the Skylights found themselves ahead 16-13. From there, Northern really buckled down and went into the locker room with a comfortable 33-25 lead.

But the second half turned out to be anything but comfortable for Northern, which struggled on offense and shot just 30 percent from the field on a night when the Skylights were without the services of Laramie Schwenke and Kylee Denham.

Lethbridge battled back and took the lead at 50-49 with 4:11 to play, and the Horns’ also went up 51-50. From there however, a series of defensive plays and one more big three by Bruursema helped MSU-N preserve the home victory.

“We put a lot of pressure on our defense tonight,” Mouat said. “With turnovers and missed layups and things, we really forced ourselves to win this game on the defensive end. And we put a lot of pressure on ourselves to make a big shot down the stretch. Fortunately, we had enough in the tank to get it done at the end.”

Bruursema was the catalyst for the shorthanded Skylights. She poured in a game-high 25 points and grabbed five rebounds. Bruursema also went 4-for-8 from three, her fourth straight game in which she shot a high percentage form beyond the arc. Nikki Tresch chipped in with 14 points for MSU-N, while freshman Rachelle Bennett grabbed a team-high seven rebounds, and Taylor Cummings scored six points, dished out two assists and grabbed a whopping six steals. Defensively, the Skylights forced the Horns’ into 26 turnovers and Bennett, Bruursema and Kelly Millager got big stops down the stretch. The Skylights also got Laci Keller back into the fold after she missed three games last weekend.

“This is another game where Jordan Bruursema really came up big for us, not only with her shooting but with her defense in the paint,” Mouat said. “Lethbridge is a big, physical team and she did a really good
job defensively. And again, she’s not just shooting really well from outside right now, she’s making pressure shots. So I was proud of her effort tonight. I was proud of the whole team’s effort. In that respect, it was a really good 40 minutes for us.”

The win gives Northern its best start in quite some time. The Skylights are 5-0 and will have two weeks off before hitting the road to face the Montana Lady Griz on Nov. 7 in Missoula. Northern won’t play at home again until Dec. 8.

“We’re growing as we go right now,” Mouat said. “And tonight was certainly a sign of that. We weren’t at our best by any means, but we found a way to win and we’re 5-0 right now. There’s a lot to clean up, but we’ll take this and be happy with where we’re at right now.”

MSU-Northern women keep winning streak intact
Skylights 54, Lethbridge 51

UL — Ali Cameron 3-7 6-6 12, Natlaie Nichols 6-9 1-3 13. Kaitlyn Olson 1-4 0-0 2, Kim Veldman 3-6 2-2 8, Deanna Dotts 1-4 0-0 2, Cassidy Teal 3-4 0-0 7, Jami Wiebe 2-3 1-3 7. Totals: 19-44 12-20 51.

MSU-N — Jordan Bruursema 8-19 5-9 25, Kelly Millager 1-3 0-0 2, Nikki Tresch 3-15 6-6 14, Rachelle Bennett 2-6 0-0 4, Taylor Cummings 1-6 4-6 6, Micah Kirkpatrick 0-1 0-0 0, Laci Keller 1-3 1-2 3. Totals: 16-53 16-23 54.

Halftime: 33-25 MSU-N; 3-point field goals: MSU-N 6-15 (Bruursema 4-8, Tresch 2-6); Rebounds: MSU-N 28 (Bennett 7, Bruursema 5, Millager 5); Fouls: MSU-N 14; Fouled out: None.