Skylights sweep in Great Falls

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After a weekend with two more games, it is still so far so good for the Montana State University-Northern women's basketball team.

The Skylights spent the weekend in Great Falls, where they faced two nonconference opponents. Friday, the Skylights defeated Valley City State University 62-52, and on Saturday, the Skylights defeated Central Baptist University 68-40. The two wins mean a flawless record for MSU-N, as they improved to 7-0 on the season.

"You always want to win every game you play," Skylights head coach Chris Mouat said. "We expect success, but given some of the things our team has been through and some of the situations we were in numbers-wise, this (7-0 start) is a little bit surprising. We have already gotten through some tough spots in our season because of some kids who were not slated to play a ton early have been playing key roles for us and helping us win games. That experience early has helped us a lot in these later games. I like where we are at."

In Friday's win, the Skylights had to come from behind before grabbing the win.

MSU-N trailed 31-29 at the half, but made their move with a 20-5 run to start the second half. Jordan Bruursema knocked down five straight points and Kylee Dehham grabbed two quick 3-pointers in the run. The Skylights had decent offensive production in the first half, but things heated up even more after the break.

Nikki Tresch also played a major role in the win over the Vikings. Tresch hit a key trey late in the game and turned around and grabbed a quick steal on defense. That series of events helped seal the deal and the 62-52 win for Northern, after fending off a Calley City 10-0 run that brought the lead narrowly to 53-52 for the Skylights.

The Skylights also went 21-of-24 from the free-throw-line. And Laramie Schwenke had a game high 15 points, 11 of which came in the first half. Tresch also finished with 14 points, while Denham finished with 13 to lead the way.

After a quick turnaround, the Skylights took on Central Baptist University on Saturday. But this time the Skylights took a 27-9 lead at the half and stretched it to a 68-40 win.

In the first half, Central Baptist had just nine points, they had more turnovers and fouls in that half as well. That was due to solid defense by the Skylights, something that actually carried them through the first half and the rest of the game. Though they scored 27 points in the first half, MSU-N didn’t have the production they are capable of to start the game.

"We were very fortunate our defense stepped up and carried us in the first half," Mouat said. "And, thankfully, our defense did because this team (Central Baptist) can really get on track, but we didn’t allow that. We played aggressive, but smart. We forced a ton of turnovers and I really felt like our defense was team defense. We found a way to be effective and we really had to be."

The Skylights forced 22 turnovers.

In the second half the Skylights outscored the opposition 41-31. Bruursema led the scoring with 18 points. Tresch added 11 points in the win, and Schwenke added 10. MSU-N had nine girls score on Saturday.
Overall, it was another good weekend for the Skylights and coach Mouat. They improved to 7-0 and beat two very good teams to do so. But both games missed the balance and consistency they are looking for. The schedule only gets harder from here, and the Skylights are really looking to lock down the balance on the offensive and defensive ends of the floor.

“We just want to keep getting better and I think we did that,” Mouat said. “There were times that we struggled, but when we struggled on one end of the floor, it seemed like we bailed ourselves out on the other end. If we were struggling on defensive end we would knock down a shot, and if we were struggling to knock down shots we got it done on defense. I am happy with being 7-0, but it only gets tougher starting this Friday.”

Friday the Skylights will remain on the road to take on Minnesota State-Moorhead in Billings. And Saturday they will face Minot State in Billings, in two exhibition games. The Skylights will finally play at home again on Dec. 8 when they host the Dickinson State Blue Hawks.