Skylights crown Mount Royal
MSU-Northern women complete stellar nonconference schedule
George Ferguson
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The Montana State University-Northern women’s basketball team had a chance to finish off an improbable and special start to 2011-12 season in the final day of the year.

And after a shaky first few minutes, the Skylights did just that.

Northern improved to a remarkable 13-1 and ended the nonconference portion of the schedule by thumping Alberta’s Mount Royal University 63-47 Saturday afternoon at the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse.

The Skylights looked rusty after not playing since Dec. 17, but some key 3-pointers by Kylee Denham and Laramie Schwenke got them going, and from there, they were able to keep the pesky Cougars, who MSU-N beat 67-61 back in October, at bay.

“We weren’t real crisp on either end of the floor,” Northern head coach Chris Mouat said. “We were especially sloppy offensively in the first half. We had a lot of missed layups and missed free throws and really we didn’t play all that well defensively.

“Credit Mount Royal too,” he added. “That’s a solid team we played tonight and in the second half, we really had to pull it together and impose our will to be able to beat them. And in the end, I think we did that. We have a lot to clean up before Friday night, but a win is a win and we’re happy we were able to find ways to win this one.”

For a time, the Skylights imposed their will in the first half. Northern fell behind 9-3 and struggled to get shots to fall. The Skylights had several early ball handling miscues as well. But Schwenke, who was questionable with an ankle injury coming in, knocked down two big three’s, while Jordan Bruursema connected on an old-fashioned 3-point play to give Northern a lead at 16-14. The Cougars hung in the rest of the way, but the Skylights managed to close the half on an 11-2 run and lead 27-21. In that run, Taylor Cummings and Laci Keller gave Northern some good minutes, something Mouat thought was critical to his team’s success.

“Our bench really gave us a lift,” Mouat said. “Everybody played today and everybody did something that helped us. I thought Taylor Cummings did a real nice job and Laci really did well on both ends of the floor. But really, our whole bench played well and we needed them too. And we’re going to continue to need them to step up. So I was really pleased with that.”

In the second half, Northern’s shooting percentages went way up and as a result, so did the lead. Nikki Tresch and Bruursema each hit trey’s in the first two minutes of the half, as the Skylights opened up a 12-point lead. By the team Schwenke hit her fourth triple of the game, the Skylights were up 18 and the Cougars couldn’t mount a charge.

“I thought we did shoot it better in the second half,” Mouat said. “I felt like we settled in and adjusted to what they did defensively. Credit our kids for putting their heads down and really working through some adversity in this game.”
Schwenke finished with a game-high 19 points and led four Skylights in double figures. Denham added 11 points and was one of five Skylights to grab four rebounds. Bruursema and Tresch each chipped in with 10 points, while Keller added six points and four boards off the bench. As a team, Northern shot 44 percent from the floor but shot 50 percent in the second half. The Skylight defense forced Mount Royal, which is transitioning to CIS in Canada, into 27 turnovers.

And in the end, no matter how the Skylights had to get the job done, they won their 13th game of the season against just one loss. Northern enters Frontier Conference play on a five-game winning streak and with plenty of confidence.

"It’s been a great start to the season," Mouat said. "I’m very proud of what this team has accomplished so far. We have a long way to go and a lot to get cleaned up. I still think our ceiling is very high. So now we just go back to work and get prepared for what will be a really tough Frontier Conference."

The Skylights open league play Friday night at home against the University of Great Falls.

**Skylights 63, Mount Royal 47**

**MR** — Katie Pearson 1-7 2-2 4, Danica Rybachuk 1-3 2-2 4, Emily Larson 4-8 3-3 13, Kristen Docherty 3-3 0-1 6, Kari Youmans 3-5 2-2 8, Carrie Pickering 1-2 0-0 2, Evan Hudson 1-4 1-1 3, Jessica Comfort 2-9 0-0 4, India Ashboth 0-1 0-0 0, Nikki Golding 0-0 0-0 0, Annaliese Posein 1-1 0-0 2, Jorgia Van De Sype 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 17-44 10-11 47.

**MSU-N** — Nikki Tresch 2-8 5-5 10, Laramie Schwenke 7-12 1-2 19, Kylee Denham 5-11 0-0 11, Rachelle Bennett 1-2 1-2 3, Taylor Cummings 0-1 2-6 2, Leah Olson 0-1 0-0 0, Jordan Bruursema 4-9 1-1 10, Micah Kirkpatrick 0-1 0-0 0, Kelly Millager 1-2 0-0 2, Michaela Howe-Cobb 0-0 0-0 0, Laci Keller 1-1 4-4 6. Totals 21-48 14-20 63.