Skylights fight back to beat rival Argos

George Ferguson
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It was by no means easy. At times, it wasn’t even pretty. But the Montana State University-Northern women’s basketball team found a way to keep moving forward.

Friday night at the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse, the Skylights staged a second-half comeback and beat the University of Great Falls Argos 55-47 in the Frontier Conference opener for both teams.

The win pushed Northern to a sparkling 14-1 overall record and a 1-0 start in league play. It should also give the Skylights even more confidence considering the Argos pulled ahead in the second half and had MSU-N on the ropes for a time.

"UGF is a very good team, they are well-coached and they played a great second half,” Northern junior Jordan Bruursema said. “But I just feel like we have a team that’s really confident because of how we have played in the nonconference season. We have had so many close games this year, so when things got tough tonight, we just stayed confident. That confidence as a team is huge for us and it really helped us tonight.”

The game was a tale of ebbs and flows on both sides.

The Skylights rattled off a 7-0 run with a Laramie Schwenke 3-pointer and back-to-back baskets by Kelly Millager to lead 15-8 early on. Then, Northern scored 12 unanswered points to finish the first half and lead 27-14 at intermission.

But the first 10 minutes of the second half was a different story. After a Nikki Tresch three, the Argos went on an 11-0 run behind three’s from Sydnee Burke and Sarah Sciascia, while the Skylights went ice cold.

"It’s not often you hold a team in this league to 14 points in a half,” Northern head coach Chris Mouat said. "So we felt pretty good about where we were at at halftime.

"But UGF didn’t go away. They have really good players who can hurt you in a variety of ways and they came right back at us. At the same time, we didn’t do a lot right in the second half. We missed too many free throws and we missed wide open layups and those are things we absolutely have to clean up. But we have good leadership on this team and those kids pulled us through the fire a little tonight. We weathered the storm and fortunately, we had enough in the tank and found ways to win.”

The Argos led 37-35 with just over 11 minutes left in the game. At that point, Northern had gone nine minutes making just two field goals.

But when they needed a response, the Skylights finally got them. Bruursema scored eight points in the final 10 minutes, Millager made a key layup to give MSU-N the lead back and down the stretch, Tresch made two big layups to help the Skylights build a six-point lead with two minutes to go. From there, Northern’s defense stood tall and MSU-N made just enough free throws to ice the game.
"It took a while in the second half, but I think we got it figured out," Bruursema said. "UGF is a good team and they were doing some things to us defensively that we didn’t answer very well.

“But late in the game we got it figured out and I think that comes from our experience and our chemistry. We didn’t get nervous or panic when we fell behind, we just knew we had to execute better. I also think we got a big boost from our bench. Everyone who played did really good things to help us come back and win.”

“We certainly didn’t play as well as we had hoped we would, and credit UGF for some of that,” Mouat said. “But down the stretch, Jordan hit big shots, Nikki hit big shots, Laramie made big plays and we got stops when we needed them. Our veteran kids gave us a big boost tonight. I thought we also did a better job on the boards late in the game. We lost by nine on the boards, but it felt worse than that, so I’m proud of the way our kids responded to adversity and the way they were able to hold UGF off at the end.”

Northern shot 44 percent and made seven triples, while the Argos outrebounded the Skylights 44-35. Schwenke finished with 16 points, while Tresch scored 12 and Bruursema added 10 points and a team-high eight rebounds. Millager and Kylee Denham added six points apiece, while UGF (0-1, 4-8) got 12 from Sciascia, all in the second half.

Defensively, the Skylights may have been outrebounded, but they turned up the heat on the Argos several times. Northern forced 14 turnovers in the first 20 minutes of the game, and got a total of 27.

“Our whole team kept their composure when things got tough and everyone chipped in tonight,” Mouat said. We know we need to get better and clean things up because it’s only going to get tougher from here.

“But UGF also came in here and did a nice job tonight so credit to them,” he added. “And the bottom line is, we’re 14-1 and we have a conference win under our belt, so we’ll be happy about that and move on to two tough games next week.”

The Skylights host Montana Tech on Friday night and UM-Western on Saturday.

**Game Notes:** Eleven of Schwenke’s 16 points came by way of the charity stripe Friday night. The Northern defense held the Argos to just 24 percent shooting in the first half, and forced UGF into 27 turnovers for the game. MSU-N is now on a six-game in win streak, and the Skylights should be ranked when the new NAIA Poll comes out tonight. Northern has already surpassed it win total from last season by earning its 14th win of the season Friday night against the Argos. The Skylights and Argos will meet again on Feb. 4 at the McLaughlin Center in Great Falls.

**Skylights are 1-0 in Frontier, 14-1 overall; Next up: vs Tech on Friday, vs UM-Western on Saturday**

**Skylights 55, UGF 47**

**UGF** — Shorty Ramos 1-1 1-2 3, Chelsea Adams 4-8 1-2 9, Kezia Ford 2-7 2-2 6, Sarah Sciascia 5-14 1-2 12, Sydnee Burke 2-8 0-0 5, Lindsey Abramson 2-9 0-0 4, Khayla Gladney 0-3 0-0 0, Kindra Jones 4-10 0-0 8. Totals 20-60 5-8 47.

**MSU-N** — Tresch 4-8 2-2 12, Laramie Schwenke 2-10 11-15 16, Kylee Denham 1-3 4-6 6, Rachelle Bennett 0-1 2-4 2, Taylor Cummings 0-2 0-0 0, Jordan Bruursema 5-11 0-1 10, Micah Kirkpatrick 0-1 0-0 0, Kelly Millager 3-6 0-2 6, Laci Keller 1-4 1-2 3. Totals 16-46 20-32 55.