Together, the Lewis-Clark State Warriors and Westminster Griffins are not just two of the premier teams in Frontier Conference women’s basketball, they are two of the premier teams in all of the NAIA.

Northern (15-4, 2-3) comes into this huge home stand fresh off an up-and-down weekend on the road. Last Thursday night, the Skylights beat Carroll College in a nail biter in Helena, only to see that momentum evaporate in a 61-38 loss at Rocky Mountain College last Saturday.

Making shots and layups was the key to Northern’s success against Carroll and was a major downfall at Rocky. Last Saturday, the Skylights, who currently lead the NAIA in 3-point field goal percentage (39.8) went an uncharacteristic 0-10 from beyond the arc. The Skylights have also been plagued by missed layups, turnovers and missed opportunities in recent weeks, and head coach Chris Mouat is hoping those things take a turn for the better this weekend.

And he knows, in order to upset the Warriors and Griffins, they have to.

“We have two very talented, very deep and very good teams coming to our place,” Mouat said. “So we understand that we have to play at a much higher level than we did on Saturday night against Rocky.

“As far as shooting goes, when we are playing well, our kids really feed off each other,” he added. “When one kid makes a three, it seems like someone else will follow it and hit a big shot for us. We didn’t get that first one to fall at Rocky. In going 0-10 from the three, we just didn’t have that spark. But a majority of our offensive issues come from turning the ball over, from being sloppy in our execution and from not getting any offensive rebounds, from not keeping possessions alive. So that’s our focus right now, to be crisp on offense, to rebound the ball well and to shoot shots when we’re open and make them. Our kids have shown that we can be a good shooting team and we need to find ways to get back to doing that.”

Being good on offense is only half the battle however. And when it comes to playing teams like LC State and Westminster, the Skylights will need to be very good on both ends of the floor.

The Warriors (18-2, 4-1) come to Havre as the No. 6 team in the NAIA and they just beat the rival Griffins last Thursday night. LC State will be without a huge piece of the puzzle as defending Frontier Player of the Year Jasmine Stohr, who was averaging 21 points and five rebounds per game, is currently out with a knee injury. But losing Stohr doesn’t necessarily make the Warriors vulnerable. LC is loaded on the front line with 6-3 Kirsi Voshell, who averages 13 points and 10 boards and 6-2 Alyssa Fierro, who chips in with 10 points and nine rebounds per. Both players are seniors and both have given the undersized Skylights plenty of trouble in the past.

LCSC can also hurt teams from the outside and on defense. Tasha Bishop is an outstanding shooter, while freshman Brittaney Niebergall is also making big strides for head coach Brian Orr. The Warriors are the top scoring team in the Frontier at 72 points per game, yet they are just behind Northern in scoring defense at 55 points per game allowed. So it’s obvious, LCSC has few weaknesses.
“They (Warriors) are a very talented team,” Mouat said. “They are great on the boards. So that’s the biggest area of importance for us…rebounding. If we fail to rebound the ball against them, then all bets are off. We have to be good on the boards against them, we have to get the 50-50 balls and we can’t have any lapses in hustle and effort. They (Warriors) play so hard for 40 minutes and we have to be ready to match that.

“We also have to handle their pressure,” he added. “They are a very good defensive team, whether its full-court or half-court pressure, they bring it every night. So execution and being effective offensively is also vital.”

The Skylights have found ways to stand up to the Warriors before, including in a 93-89 overtime win two years ago in Havre. Tonight, Northern will need a similar effort, including great play from senior Laramie Schwenke, who is sixth in the NAIA in 3-point percentage and averaging 15 points and five rebounds per game. But perhaps looming even bigger will be the defensive play of posts Jordan Brrursema, Laci Keller and Kelly Millager, all of whom have been great defensively this season, but will be severely tested against LC’s big front line tonight.

And no matter the outcome tonight, Northern’s short turnaround to play No. 20 Westminster (11-7, 4-1) will be just as daunting.

The Griffins struggled at times in the nonconference season, but they have certainly got things going now. Westminster has been to five straight NAIA national tournaments and this Griffin team is showing no signs of slowing down anytime soon. Westminster, which has beaten Northern twice in a row on shots at the buzzer, averages 69 points per game, allows just 58 and is one of the hottest 3-point shooting teams in the NAIA.

That’s the challenge ahead of the Skylights on Saturday night.

“So many quality players,” Mouat said. “And they’ve really got it rolling now. They are incredibly deep and they just have a bunch of really good basketball players. And any one of them can come in and give them 15-20 points a night. Size-wise, they are little bit better matchup for us, but they are still extremely hard to guard, really hard to defend in certain situations, and when they shoot it well, they can bury you. They have the potential to explode from the three. So you have to be on your toes defensively the entire game.”

The Griffins are indeed loaded. They return a bevy of impact players from last year’s national tournament team, including three-year starting point guard Nicole Yazzie, who’s a two-time NAIA All-American. Yazzie and fellow guard Dana Bates each average 12 points per game, while fellow returnees Jenteal Jackson and Allie Eastman combined to score 16 and both can light it up from the perimeter. The Griffins also got bigger in the post this year, as Cydney Tibbetts (6-1) leads the team in scoring at 13 points per game and rebounding at 10 boards per outing. Freshman guard Shelby Ellsworth (5-11) is also adding 10 points per night and is another dangerous shooter.

“They (Griffins) have a stockpile of great scorers,” Mouat said. “Actually, both teams we’re facing this weekend do. They both have great depth and loads of talent. So we certainly understand what we’re up against.

“For us, we just have to be ready to execute, defend and rebound for 40 minutes both nights,” he added. “We’re excited to be back on our home floor and we’re looking forward to the challenges these two great teams present.”

Tonight’s game between the Warriors and Skylights tips off at 6 in Havre. The Skylights host Westminster, which plays at UGF tonight, at 6 p.m. Saturday. After this weekend’s games, Northern has just two home games left during the regular season.

**MSU-Northern vs No. 6 LC State and No. 20 Westminster**
**Tonight at 6 p.m and Saturday at 6 p.m. MSU-Northern Fieldhouse**
Radio: 92.5 KPQX FM  
Streaming: www.msun.edu/athletics  
Twitter: www.twitter/havredaily  

Skylights Probable Starters  
G Laramie Schwenke, 5-8, Sr., 15 ppg, 5 rpg  
G Nikki Tresch, 5-5, Jr., 13 ppg  
G Kylee Denham, 5-8, Jr., 7 ppg  
F Kelly Millager, 6-1, Jr., 5 rpg  
F Jordan Bruursema, 6-0, Jr., 13 ppg, 6 rpg