George Ferguson Column: Friday night in the Armory was a lot of fun
From the Fringe...
George Ferguson
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In sports, it’s a rare occasion when everything just seems to go right for a night. Actually, in the world of college basketball, it’s rare that everything goes right for more than 10 minutes at a time.

Just ask any coach who dares to stalk the sidelines of a basketball court.

But on Friday night in Havre, it was one of those good nights for the Montana State University-Northern men’s and women’s basketball teams, as well as all Northern fans.

The Lights and Skylights were home to take on the Lewis-Clark State Warriors Friday night at the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse, and the first thing I have to say is congratulations to the Northern fans for showing up in full force to support the teams.

The LC State/Westminster weekend is generally one of the more poorly attended weekend’s on the Frontier Conference schedule. I’ve always wondered why because both the Warriors and Griffins always bring good and competitive teams to Havre.

But this past Friday was different. The gym was packed, it was hot and it was very loud. It reminded me of the old days in Havre, when Northern Montana College, as it was then, was playing huge Frontier games against the old UGF Argos or against Rocky Mountain College, or even against the then Eastern Montana College Yellowjackets.

Friday night sure seemed like a throwback to those days.

And it seemed like it on the floor too.

The Northern women were up first and the Skylights produced a seminal victory.

When Laci Keller scored the first two points of Friday night’s game against sixth-ranked LC State, it was hard to picture that MSU-N would never trail in the entire 40 minutes, or that the Skylights would be celebrating on the MSU-N logo at game’s end.

But that’s exactly what transpired. For 40 minutes, the Skylights played their hearts out against a big and skilled LC State team, and for 40 minutes, the Skylights were the better team.

It was as impressive a victory as the Skylights have had in some time and they deserve a ton of credit for outplaying one of the best teams in all of NAIA basketball.

The Northern men were up next and there was little doubt about who was going to win right from onset. LC State made a valiant effort early, but the Lights were simply too good for the Warriors.

In fact, Northern was so dominant on the defensive end, that a raucous Northern student section was almost subdued for parts of the game because the Lights’ seemingly sucked the life right out of LC State’s offense.

Holding any team in the Frontier Conference to 39 points is more than a job well done, it’s downright special. And that’s exactly what the Lights did to the Warriors on Friday night.
But even with the dominating performance by the Lights, which really took any drama out of the game, it was a special atmosphere on Friday night and others took notice.

Tonight was good for us playing in this type of crazy atmosphere against this good of a team,” LC head men’s coach Brandon Rinta said afterwards.

“The crowd, both nights was huge for us,” Northern head coach Shawn Huse added. “When it gets that loud and crazy in there, you hope your players don’t get too emotionally high, because then you have a tendency to maybe lose a little focus. But our players really fed off an awesome atmosphere in those games. They love playing in front of our fans and when the place is rocking like it was this weekend, it’s a lot of fun and it really gives our team a lift.”

Thanks to the fans who brought the noise, and the Skylights and Lights who brought the great play on the floor, Friday night was one of those perfect storms in Havre. It was a special night of basketball and one that while we hope is repeated more often, it most certainly won’t be forgotten.