MSU-N Notebook: Skylights execute a perfect game plan  
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As far as upsets go, the Montana State University-Northern women’s basketball team’s win over Lewis-Clark State Friday night at the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse was a big one.

After all, the Warriors came to Havre as the No. 6 team in the NAIA and with a stellar 18-2 overall record.

However, it wasn’t as if the Skylights were a slouch or essentially had no chance going into the Frontier Conference showdown. It was quite the contrary. Northern has had a tremendous season and has proved its capable of beating anybody on any given night.

On Friday night, the Skylights proved that again, and they did it by executing the game plan to near perfection.

"We obviously had to be very good rebounding the basketball," Northern head coach Chris Mouat said. "We knew coming in that if we did not at least compete on the boards, we could get run right off our own floor. And I think we competed very well on the boards.

"I think this win was really born out of a productive week in practice," he added. "After the game at Rocky, we had to take a look I the mirror and figure out who we were. We had to get back to playing our style of basketball. The kids worked hard all week and it credit to them for coming into this game ready to play."

Rebounding and defense turned out to be the biggest factor in what was MSU-N's second win over the Warriors in LC's last three trips to Havre. LC came in as the top rebounding team in the country and were out-rebounding league opponents by an average of six per night. But the Skylights won the rebounding battle 34-28, and perhaps more importantly, they limited the Warriors to just eight offensive rebounds and four second-chance points. Those numbers, combined with an 18-4 run at the start of the game and a defense which limited LC to just 37 percent shooting was enough to put the Skylights over the top.

"We were really focused in practice all week," senior Laramie Schwenke said. "Coach Mouat is big on scouting reports and I think we had a good game plan for them (Warriors). It was a matter of executing that game plan and we did that pretty well. We focused a lot defending their bigs and rebounding. And we also focused on getting better on offense, on making our layups and open shots. I think tonight, we got that confidence back on offense. I'm just really proud of the whole team."

Defense wins in Havre

The numbers don’t lie. Of the four Frontier Conference games played in Havre this weekend, the team which played the best defense certainly out-shined any offensive firepower.

The MSU-Northern men held its two opponents to an average of 33 percent shooting from the floor and a combined 89 points. Northern’s holding of Lewis-Clark State to just 39 points was ultra-impressive considering the Warriors were averaging 80 points per game on the season. Those two defensive efforts offset the Lights scoring just 53 points each against LC and Westminster, and the very rare six 3-pointers the Lights made throughout four halves of basketball this weekend.

That's the best defensive team we've played all year," said LCSC head coach Brandon Rinta. "It took us 20 minutes just to adjust."
It was a great defensive effort which also helped the Skylights knock off LC on Friday night, but MSU-N got the tables turned by Westminster on Saturday. The Griffins swarmed the Skylights, holding them to just 39 points and 38 percent shooting for the game. MSU-N also committed 20 turnovers against Westminster, which helped spell doom in the end.

Bench Rising

The Lights were in a dogfight with Westminster right from the get-go on Saturday night. That’s nothing new as the two teams have had some great games against each other over the years.

And when you win by three points, you can always point to some little things which made the difference. One of those little things for Northern was the BIG play of its bench.

Redshirt freshman Corbin Pearson made two huge baskets in the second half of the Lights’ comeback against the Griffins, and he also pulled down a key offensive rebound. Chris Brown also made a big second half bucket for the Lights as they started to rally, while David Maddock had a key shot in the lane during Northern’s comeback bid as well. And when you win by three, it turns out the Lights needed every one of those plays to upset the Griffins.

Friday night was no different. Jordan Harris had one of his best games of the season, coming on in the first half to score eight points, which sparked the Lights to a 30-16 halftime lead.

Huge Turnout

The crowds at MSU-Northern games this season have been big and they’ve been awesome. But this past weekend saw Northern fans turn out in near record numbers.

On both Friday and Saturday night, the old Armory Gymnasium was filled to near capacity numbers and the fans certainly provided a home-court advantage for the Lights and Skylights. The Northern student section was in full effect, especially on Friday night when a large contingent of MSU-N football players showed up painted in black and were into the games from start to finish.

Fans then turned up the decibel meter on Saturday night even more. During a Westminster possession just after the Lights had tied the game, the crowd roared for nearly the entire 35-second shot clock and Westminster’s players could clearly be seen not being able to verbally communicate with each other.

Kudos to the Northern fans. They’ve been great all season, but this weekend, they took it up even another notch.