Skylights finally back in action
MSU-Northern women take on vaunted Lady Griz tonight in Missoula
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The Montana State University-Northern women’s basketball team needs to get back to game action.

The Skylights (2-1) haven’t played a real game since an Oct. 26 home loss to the University of Lethbridge, thanks in large part to two cancelled home games against Culver-Stockton, which were to be played in Havre this past weekend.

But now, just wanting to play, the Skylights will look to shake off the rust against an opponent which will have no sympathy towards Northern’s situation. Tonight, the Skylights are in Missoula to take on the University of Montana Lady Griz (0-1) at 7 inside Dahlberg Arena. The game will not count towards Northern’s regular season record, but it does count for the Lady Griz, which means UM will be gunning for the Skylights.

Northern is making the trip to Missoula for the third time under head coach Chris Mouat, and the Skylights might be walking into a hornet’s nest. The Lady Griz are coming off a 55-41 season-opening loss at Temple last weekend, so they will certainly be hungry for a win. The Griz beat the Skylights 70-48 last November in Missoula.

Meanwhile, MSU-N is looking to jump-start its season after nearly three weeks off. Mouat is realistic about his team’s chances in Missoula tonight, but he also knows that getting back into action is the most important thing, especially considering the Skylights have two NAIA games coming up this weekend in Great Falls.

“This is the first game back for us in a long time,” Mouat said. “So this game is very important for us, in that we just need to get back into game mode. It’s going to be very important that we come out and play as hard as we can and be as competitive as we can be, not just for this game, but to prepare us for the games we have to play this weekend in Great Falls.”

Northern got its season started on the right track, winning two games in Canada early last month. And while the Pronghorns tripped up the Skylights in Havre, Northern is still a team which is gearing up for a strong season.

So far, senior guard Nikki Tresch has shot the ball well, as she leads the team in scoring at 13 points per game. Tresch scored a season-high 20 points in the loss to Lethbridge. Point guard Taylor Cummings is also playing well in her first season as a starter, while seniors Jordan Bruursema, Lacie Keller and Kylee Denham give the Skylights a good, inside-out punch. Bruursema scored 17 points and grabbed 11 rebounds in last year’s loss to the Lady Griz.

But tonight’s game in Missoula will be an entirely different experience for Northern. The Griz are loaded with talent at every position on the floor. Legendary head coach Robin Selvig can throw great shooting guards Kenzie De Boer and Kellie Cole at the Skylights, or choose to go inside with a front court that seemingly never ends. The Griz boast six power forwards who all have the potential to earn Big Sky...
Conference honors this season, including 6-2 junior Jordan Sullivan, 6-0 seniors Katie Baker, Alyssa Smith and Alex Hurley, 6-2 sophomore Carly Selvig and 6-0 sophomore Maggie Rickman. Add in a talented point guard in junior Torry Hill, and true freshman Shanae Gilham, and the Skylights will have their hands full tonight.

“They (Griz) are loaded,” Mouat said. “They are still a really young team, but they have a ton of experience. And they have so much depth. They are talented at every position and they can hurt you in about every way possible. They are a great defensive team, especially with their zone, and they are dangerous offensively. They are set up to have a big year in the Big Sky in my opinion.

“So our attitude is, who better to play than them to help us get back into the swing of things,” he added. “Playing a great program like Montana will only make us better.”

And the Skylights are indeed looking to get better. Northern is a veteran team prepping for another run at a Frontier Conference championship and the path to the start of the Frontier season begins tonight with the daunting task of playing the Lady Griz.

“This is a great opportunity for us,” Mouat said. “And that’s the attitude we have to take for this game. We understand the challenges of playing a team like them (Griz), and we have to go out and make the most of this opportunity. We want to play as hard as we can, we want to fight them on the boards, limit them to one shot and play very well on defense. We want to go out there and be as competitive as we can be against a great team in front of a great crowd.”

Tonight’s game between the Skylights and Grizzlies tips off at 7 in Missoula. Fans can view the game online by going to bigskytv.org. The Skylights are in Great Falls for games against Concordia of California Friday night and San Diego Christian Saturday afternoon.