Lady Griz too big for Skylights
MSU-N women fight hard in exhibition game at famed University of Montana
George Ferguson
Wednesday, November 14th, 2012

Tuesday night’s road game at the famed Dahlberg in Arena won’t count against the Montana State University-Northern women’s basketball team’s overall record this season. But the game against the powerful University of Montana Lady Griz will matter in so many other ways.

The Skylights fell to the Lady Griz 75-45 Tuesday night in Missoula, but after the game was over, Northern head coach Chris Mouat found plenty of things he liked in his team’s play against one of the Big Sky Conference’s most dominant programs of all time.

“We’re not satisfied with some things,” Mouat said. “We made some mental mistakes that shouldn’t happen no matter who we’re playing. But those mistakes aside, I really liked some things we did tonight. I thought our physical effort was very good and I told the kids that after the game. I thought we played very hard for 40 minutes. And I thought we shot the ball pretty well considering how good their defense is.

“We certainly have a lot of things to clean up,” he added. “Things we can get better at. But this game will help us with those things. I thought we learned a lot about ourselves tonight, and this experience will help us going forward.”

Northern did shoot well, over the top of a taxing Lady Griz zone defense. The Skylights finished the game better than 40 percent from the floor and made 7-of-18 3-pointers. MSU-N also got a game-high 15 points from senior Nikki Tresch, who made three triples.

But in the end, an early scoring run, as well as Montana’s size and the Griz’ defense was too much for the Skylights to overcome.

The score was just 6-4 with 17 minutes left in the first half, when the Griz ripped off a 15-0 run to up the lead to 21-4. In that same stretch, Northern went nearly nine minutes without a field goal, and the Griz went on to lead 40-18 at halftime.

MSU-N trimmed the lead down to 13 points midway through the second half, but UM wore the Skylights down in the paint, and also forced Northern into 20 turnovers. UM, which plays as many as six players over 6-0, out-rebounded Northern 39-25, and the Griz out-did the smaller Skylights 38-18 in the paint.

“They’re good, they’re (Griz) the real deal,” Mouat said. “They are really locked in on defense and their length and their strength on the inside really wore us down. I thought we did some really good things defensively, and we shot the ball well, but they (Griz) just really got after us with their size and their length and that was a big difference.

“So we’re going to take this experience and really learn from it,” he added. “Because we got to play a great team tonight in a great environment. I have so much respect for Montana’s program and what coach Selvig does year-in-and-year-out, and tonight, they showed why they are going to have a big year in the Big Sky.”

Montana (1-1) had four players in double figures, including true freshman Shanae Gilham, who scored 12 points off the bench. Katie Baker also poured in 12, while Kellie Cole and Kenzie De Boer each scored 10. The Skylights saw only Tresch reach double digits, while true freshman Kacie McKeon had a nice game,
scoring eight points and making two three’s. Kassie Barta added two threes for six points, and Kylee Denham paced MSU-N on the glass with four rebounds.

And though the final margin was lopsided, the game was exactly what the Skylights needed, after not playing for over three weeks.

“This was very good for us,” Mouat said. “This game will make us better and we understand that. We have a lot of areas we can improve and we’re going to work hard to get there. But this game will really benefit us in the long run.”

MSU-N (2-1) will go right back on the road for games against Concordia of California Friday night and San Diego Christian Saturday afternoon in Great Falls. MSU-N next plays at home Nov. 30 against Carroll College.

Montana 75, Skylights 45

MSU-N – Jordan Bruursema 2-7 0-4 4, Laci Keller 1-1 0-0 2, Nikki tresch 5-10 2-2 15, Kylee Denham 0-2 0-0 0, Taylor Cummings 2-3 2-3 6, Kassie Barta 2-7 0-0 6, Kacie McKeon 3-7 0-0 8, Rachelle Bennett 2-2 0-0 4, Macey Cox 0-1 0-0 0, Maurisha McKissic 0-3 0-2 0. Totals 17-43 4-11 45.

UM – Alyssa Smith 4-4 0-0 10, Katie Baker 5-10 2-2 12, Jordan Sullivan 3-11 2-2 8, Torry Hill 0-2 2-2 2, Kenzie De Boer 5-8 0-0 10, Kellie Cole 3-4 3-4 10, Calry Selvig 3-6 1-2 7, Shanae Gilham 5-6 0-0 12. Totals: 29-62 12-14 75.