Skylights set for tough games in Great Falls

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The Montana State University-Northern women’s basketball team has only played one home game, and four games overall this season. And though the Skylights are away from Havre this weekend, they’ll be playing two NAIA powerhouses as close to home as they can get.

MSU-N (2-1) is in Great Falls for games against Concordia of California, today and San Diego Christian Saturday at a tournament hosted by the UGF Argos.

Northern enters this weekend’s important matchups fresh off a 75-45 loss to the University of Montana on Tuesday night in Missoula. The game didn’t count towards the Skylights’ overall record, but it certainly was a good experience for Northern, and one that impressed longtime UM head coach Robin Selvig.

"There were a lot of things we can learn from this game, and I give Northern credit for that," Selvig said. "They were overmatched because they don't have that much size, but they are well-coached.

"I like some of the things they run. In fact I think we're going to steal a couple of things they run on offense," Selvig added. "They made us work hard (on defense). They got us about four times on the backdoor, so it was a good learning experience for us. It wasn't just la-de-da and we beat them badly. We had to work hard to guard them."

Nikki Tresch scored a game-high 15 points against the Lady Griz, as the senior point guard continued to lead MSU-N in scoring. MSU-N also got a big lift from true freshman Kacie McKeon, who played quality minutes in Missoula, as did transfer Kassie Barta.

And with the exhibition loss to UM in their rearview mirror, the Skylights now get their first taste of NAIA competition this season. MSU-N’s three regular season games have come against Canadian opponents, but tonight’s game against Concordia will be on a different level.

“This is a very fast and athletic team,” Northern head coach Chris Mouat said. “They play a very deep bench and have a ton of good athletes. They like to pressure for 40 minutes and get after it on the defensive end. They are also explosive on offense and have a bunch of different kids that can get going from the 3-point line as well as to the rim. Their big kids are really athletic and long and do a nice job for them. We will need to be very alert defensively and do a great job on the boards against them, and we must take care of the basketball against their pressure.”

The Eagles are 0-1 on the young season, while Northern opponent for Saturday, San Diego Christian, another member of the Golden State Athletic Conference comes to Great Falls with an impressive 2-1 start to the season.

“This is another very athletic team, and one who is getting national attention,” Mouat said. “They (Hawks) had a great season last year and have gotten off to a good start this year, with a NCAA DII win already under their belt (Cal-State Dominguez Hills). Chardonnay Shula is a very dynamic player for them and leads them in both scoring and rebounding, but they have a great group around her, and three kids averaging in double figures. As a team, they shoot a lot of threes, and a bunch of their kids shoot it really
well. They are disciplined and play good team defense, and do a nice job on the offensive boards. Again, rebounding and defense will be major keys for us as they present some big matchup challenges.”

Two games against GSAC powers will certainly be a challenge for a Skylight squad who has yet to really hit its stride. But, with so few games under their belt, and just over a month until Frontier Conference play begins full time, Mouat is looking forward to the tests his team will face this weekend.

“We’re excited to be playing fairly close to home, and to have such strong teams to compete against,” Mouat said. “This is going to be very much like a Frontier Conference weekend. We need to bring great intensity at both ends, and continue to get better every step of the way.”

Tonight’s game between the Skylights and Concordia tips off at 5 at the McLaughlin Center in Great Falls. Saturday’s game against San Diego Christian gets underway at 4 p.m. in Great Falls.