Skylights silence Wolves
George Ferguson
Sunday, December 16th, 2012

After blowing out Walla Walla University on Thursday night, the Montana State University-Northern women’s basketball team knew it would get the Wolves’ best shot in a rematch two days later.

And the Skylights did, but it mattered little as Northern used a hot-shooting start to once again bury the Wolves. MSU-N made six 3-pointers in the first 11 minutes of the game on its way to a 77-36 win over Walla Walla Saturday night at the Armory Gymnasium in Havre. The game was the finale of the three-night MSU-Northern Duck Inn Holiday Classic.

The win over Walla Walla improved MSU-N’s overall record to 7-4 heading into the Christmas break. Northern won’t play again until a Dec. 28 trip to California.

“I was happy with the start, especially from the perimeter,” MSU-N head coach Chris Mouat said. “Nikki (Tresch) hit her first four shots, and I thought everybody else kid of fed off her. And as a result of such a good start, we were able to build a pretty big lead.

“But I wasn't happy with how kind of coasted the rest of the way,” Mouat continued. “because we shot the ball so well early, we settled into taking a lot of three’s and we passed on some things we could have gotten inside. We have to learn that we can’t do that. We can’t always settle for those types of shots.”

Northern did wind up shooting just 10-of-26 from beyond the arc, including a dismal 1-for-8 in the second half. But the start to the game was still too much for Walla Walla to overcome.

Tresch and Jordan Bruursema buried back-to-back 3-pointers to get the Skylights off and running, and in the first nine minutes, Tresch would go on to hit to more, while Kassie Barta and Kacie McKeon also got in on the long-range act. At one point, MSU-N ripped off a 19-5 run, and the Skylights found themselves leading 41-14 at intermission.

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The Skylights were in fact very good on the boards, out-rebounding the Wolves 54-28 for the game. But despite being overmatched for the third straight night in Havre (Walla Walla lost 101-46 to Rocky Mountain College Friday afternoon), the Wolves never gave in.

Walla Walla started the second half by cutting MSU-N’s lead all the way down to just 12 points, while the Skylights came out sluggish. Northern made just two field goals in the first six minutes of the second half.
“I was really impressed with how hard Walla Walla fought tonight,” Mouat said. “They were tired, but they kept getting after it. They scrapped and fought hard, and we kind of thought we could just coast in the second half. And as a result of that, we were not very impressive in that second half. So we can learn a lot from this game.”

Though the Wolves did manage to slice into Northern’s lead, it wouldn’t be enough. Tresch hit a running layup at the 13:29 mark, and Laci Keller followed with six straight points in the paint. Northern out-scored Walla Walla 15-4 in a four-minute span, and when Tresch nailed her fifth triple of the game with five minutes to go, the Skylights were well out in front again, and the Wolves had no chance of a comeback.

Tresch once again led a balanced MSU-N attack with 17 points, and a 5-for-8 performance from three. Bruursema added 13 points and seven rebounds, while Keller scored 10. Rachelle Bennett added seven points and seven boards and Kacie McKeon came off the bench to score seven as well. The Skylight bench was again a factor as well. Northern got 28 bench points, including six each from Leah Olson, Kassie Barta and Michaela Howe-Cobb. Howe-Cobb added a game-high nine rebounds as well.

“Credit to Walla Walla for playing really hard on defense and giving a great effort tonight,” Mouat said. “As for us, I was pleased with the start, and I liked how our bench came to play again.

“We’ll use this game to learn and get things cleaned up,” he added. “We’ll have to because from here, things get a lot more difficult for us.”

The Skylights will be off through Christmas, then trek to California for games against nationally-ranked The Master’s College Dec. 28 and New Hope International Dec. 29. Northern will return home to re-open Frontier Conference play Jan. 3-4 against Dickinson State and Rocky Mountain College.

Repeat Performance

Skylights 77, Walla Walla 36

WWU — Nicolette Neal 2-10 4-4 9, Dani Carlman 4-16 2-2 11, Johanna Uribe 1-4 0-0 3, Michelle Warner 0-4 1-1 1, Abbey Mazano 4-13 1-1 10, Giselle Schmitz 1-4 0-0 2. Totals: 12-57 8-9 36.

MSU-N — Jordan Bruursema 3-8 6-6 13, Laci Keller 3-4 4-4 10, Nikki Tresch 6-10 0-0 17, Rachelle Bennett 2-6 3-4 7, Taylor Cummings 1-3 0-0 2, Kassie Barta 2-6 0-0 6, Kacie McKeon 2-8 2-2 7, Leah Olson 2-5 2-2 6, Macey Cox 1-2 0-0 3, Maurisha McKissic 0-3 0-1 0, Michaela Howe-Cobb 3-6 0-0 6. Totals: 77.

Halftime: Northern 41-14. 3-pointers: MSU-N 10-26 (Bruursema 1, Tresch 5, Barta 2, McKeon 1, Cox 1), WWU 4-15 (Neel 1, Carlman 1, Uribe 1, Manzano 1). Rebounds: MSU-N 54 (Howe-Cobb 9), WWU 28 (Neel 4, Carlman 4). Fouls: MSU-N 11, WWU 15. Fouled out: None.