Skylights earn a split in California
George Ferguson
Saturday, December 29th, 2012

If the Montana State University-Northern women's basketball team was looking for a test prior to Frontier Conference play, the Skylights got it this past weekend in California.

Northern went 1-1 in a pair of road games in the Jersey Mike’s Classic in Santa Clarita, Calif., losing to nationally-ranked The Master’s College on Friday afternoon, but rebounding to beat Hope International University on Saturday afternoon.

The split gives the Skylights a solid 8-5 record as they head into Frontier Conference play next week.

Friday held little surprises as unbeaten and 11th-ranked The Master's beat the Skylights 62-45. The Mustangs beat four Frontier teams in the non-conference season, including Westminster, the league favorite.

The Master's is one of the best defensive teams in the NAIA, and it showed against the Skylights. The Mustangs held Northern to 19 first-half points, and just four 3-pointers the entire game. And though MSU-N shot the ball a little better in the second half, the Mustangs‘ defense, along with a sound effort in the paint, prevented Northern from being able to mount a full come back.

"They (Mustangs) really jumped on us early, but we responded and came back to tie the game early," MSU-N head coach Chris Mouat said. "We had a couple of offensive lulls in the first half and one in the second half that really hurt us. But they really defend well and make it tough to get good shots.
"They are as long and athletic a team as we've faced, and they mix their defenses well," he continued. "I was extremely proud of our kids for the way they battled. We held them to a season-low output, and had the lead manageable in the second half. We out rebounded them and did some really good things. Ultimately, though, they wore us down and we just didn't shoot it good enough to give ourselves a chance."

Laci Keller was the only Skylight to reach double figures, scoring 10 points. Kylee Denham returned from an ankle injury to score eight points and grab eight rebounds as Northern did beat the Mustangs on the board. Sophomore point guard Taylor Cummings chipped in with seven points and Maurisha McKissic had a nice game off the bench, scoring six points and grabbing five rebounds. The Master’s had four players in double figures, led by Jacquelyn Marshall's 14 points.

And though Friday was a tough day for the Skylights, they certainly turned things around on Saturday.

Northern blistered the nets to the tune of 58 percent from the field, and made 10 3-pointers on its way to a 75-54 win over Hope International.

"They (Wildcats) had two kids coming into the game averaging around 20 points per game, and they are very, very explosive as a team," Mouat said. "From the 3-point-line, they are deadly if left open, and we left them far too often in the first half. I was really pleased with our offensive output in the second half and we made a huge adjustment defensively that really helped.

"The bottom line is that our kids really dug this one out and closed them out in convincing fashion late in the game," He added. "We again won on the boards and shot good percentages from the field and from the 3-point-line, and we had four kids score in double figures. It was a good team win, for sure. They are a good team, and we were extremely tired from Friday's game. Both of these games will definitely go a long way in preparing us for the Frontier Conference."
The first half was a barn burner with both teams trading shots. Both the Skylights and HIU shot better than 50 percent in the first half, while the Skylights held a slim, 37-33 at halftime.

In the final 20 minutes, the Skylights turned up the heat on both ends of the floor. Northern made six three’s on offense, while holding HIU to just 29 percent shooting and one triple in the second stanza.

Nikki Tresch nailed five three’s on her way to a game-high 21 points in the win over HIU. Fellow senior Jordan Bruursema added 16 points, three trey's and nine rebounds, while Denham had another solid outing, scoring 11 points. Keller added 10 points and five boards, while Kassie Barta scored seven off the bench. HIU got a pair of 20-point efforts from Brittany Bauman and Andrina Rendon.

With the non-conference season behind them, the Skylights till return home to host Dickinson State University on Thursday night and Rocky Mountain College Friday night.

The Master’s 62, Skylights 45


Halftime: Master’s 30-19. 3-pointers: MSU-N 4-17 (Denham 1, Bruursema 1, Barta 1, Cummings 1), TMC 3-16 (Scott 2, Iverson 1). Rebounds: MSU-N 37 (Denham 8), TMC 34 (Burns 8). Fouls: MSU-N 12, TMC 12. Fouled out: None.

Skylights 75, Hope International 54


**HIU** – Kasey Philyaw 1, Brittany Bauman 20, Krystal Canning 2, Andrina Rendon 20, Rona Towne 2. Totals: 21-58 4-10 54.