Skylights outlast Dickinson State

George Ferguson
Friday, January 4th, 2013

If someone would have told the Montana State University-Northern Skylights they were only going to make one 3-pointer prior to their Frontier Conference game with Dickinson State, Northern would have seen trouble on the horizon.

Yet, the Skylights did make just one long-range shot and still found a way to scratch out a 59-56 win over the Blue Hawks Thursday night at the Armory Gymnasium. The win over a tough DSU squad gave Northern its first win in conference play, and it was a good way to start an important home stand that will continue tonight against the Rocky Mountain College Battlin’ Bears.

“We did a lot of things to hurt ourselves tonight,” Northern head coach Chris Mouat said. “We had too many turnovers and missed free throws really hurt us. But the important thing is, we found a way to step up and overcome a lot of that. We found a way to win and I’m proud of our kids for that tonight.”

It wasn’t easy for Northern, especially at the start of the contest. The Skylights didn’t make a single field goal until the 13:30 mark of the first half, and trailed 8-5 at that point. MSU-N wrestled the lead away from the Blue Hawks on back-to-back baskets by Nikki Tresch and Kylee Denham, but eventually, the lead would change hands four more times midway through the first stanza.

And with offense hard to come by against a solid DSU defense, the Skylights wound up getting just enough to take a comfortable lead into the lockerroom. Kassie Barta nailed Northern’s only 3-pointer to give MSU-N the lead for good in the first half, while Kylee Denham started to heat up late in the half, and her play would be crucial the rest of the way.

“I thought their (Blue Hawks) perimeter defense was really good,” Mouat said as the Skylights led 28-21 at intermission. “I thought they came in here very well prepared for us and what we wanted do. They played really hard and we didn’t get off to the kind of start we would have liked.”

And though the Blue Hawks played hard, the Skylights added to their lead early in the second, behind eight points from Denham. Northern would lead by as many as 12 points, but DSU wasn’t about to go away. The Blue Hawks picked up the pace offensively and went on an 11-2 run, and by the 7:45 mark, the game was tied at 45-45.

However, Northern had the answer in the form of Laci Keller, who scored eight points in the final six minutes, and was a perfect 4-for-4 from the foul line. And with 2:39 to go, the Skylights were back in front 59-52. DSU made things interesting in the final minute with a couple of big shots, and the Blue Hawks had a chance to tie the game at the buzzer. But the long heave was off the mark and the Skylights escaped with a win.
“We didn’t play as well as we wanted to tonight,” Keller, the former Big Sandy standout said. “But we really played together. We played for each other and that really helped us pull this one out. This was really a team win.

“We had some players really step up big down the stretch,” Mouat added. “Kyle Denham had her best game of the season. And Laci Keller was huge for us down the stretch. She made some great plays and big free throws. Those kids really stepped up when we needed them to.

Denham totaled a season-high 16 points before leaving with an ankle injury. She was 6-of-7 from the field and 4-of-5 from the charity stripe, while also grabbing five rebounds and one steal. Keller finished with 12 points and seven rebounds, while Jordan Bruursema added nine points and seven boards. And though the Skylights were held to just one three, they did wind up going 20-for-27 from the foul line, including making 8-of-11 in the final five minutes.

And while DSU forced Northern into 18 turnovers, the Blue Hawks (0-2, 5-11) were out-rebounded by the Skylights 38-37. Janae Moore led DSU with 16 points, but the Skylights held Dickinson to just 31 percent shooting for the game.

“I was proud of our effort and our ability to overcome the mistakes we made tonight,” Mouat said. “And we’re happy to get the win. But our kids also understand we have to clean some things up in order to be ready for a very good Rocky team on Friday night. We dodged some big bullets tonight and did just enough to win the game. But playing at home, we want to better than that and we know we need to be against Rocky.“

The Skylights improved to 1-1 in the Frontier and 9-5 overall. They will be back in the Armory Gymnasium tonight to face Rocky Mountain College at 6.

**Skylights are 1-1 in the Frontier, 9-5 overall; Next Up: RMC Tonight at 6 p.m.**

**Skylights 59, Dickinson St. 56**

**DSU** — Janae Moore 6-15 3-4 16, Jess Bygate 2-7 2-2 6, Yianna Nadeau 3-11 0-1 7, Mariah Duran 6-19 0-0 15, Ashley Jelly 3-3 0-0 8, Jenna Cabello 1-3 0-0 2, Jaylyn Klauzer 1-7 0-0 2. Totals: 22-69 5-9 56.

**MSU-N** — Jordan Bruursema 2-5 5-8 9, Laci Keller 4-10 4-4 12, Nikki Tresch 2-3 3-4 7, Taylor Cummings 1-5 3-4 5, Kylee Denham 6-7 4-5 16, Kassie Barta 1-1 0-0 3, Kacie McKeon 0-4 0-0 0, Rachelle Bennett 1-3 0-0 2, Maurisha McKissic 2-6 1-2 5, Michaela Howe-Cobb 0-0 0-0 0. Totals: 19-44 20-27 59.