In Monday’s edition of the Havre Daily News, the headline for the Montana State University-Northern women’s basketball team’s win at Lewis-Clark State read: Skylights earn a historic win at LC State.

Little did anyone know at the time just how historic the Skylights’ 60-50 win Saturday night in Lewiston, Idaho really was.

Simply put, a Northern women’s team had never beaten the Warriors in Lewiston at any point since LCSC joined the Frontier Conference, now over 14 seasons ago. And the winless streak dates back in even longer than that.

The Skylights, who have had some phenomenal teams over the years, hadn’t beaten the Warriors on their home floor in their last 16 tries, which officially dates back to the 1997 season. Northern’s last win in Lewiston was a non-conference affair.

But that all changed on Saturday night as the Skylights not only triumphed, but they managed to beat a team which, just seven days earlier, broke their hearts in a double-overtime thriller in Havre.

The win at LCSC gave Northern back-to-back league wins for the second time this season, while it was also MSU-N’s second road win in Frontier play this season. The first came when MSU-N erased an early 11-point deficit at UGF, beating the Argos 63-60 last Thursday in Great Falls.

The Northern women moved to 5-4 in league play with the road sweep last weekend, and they also moved up the Frontier rankings as well. The Skylights were voted in a tie for third in the Frontier ratings this week with Montana Tech.

Halfway Stars

This past weekend saw the Frontier reach the halfway point in the regular season, and it’s time to hand out some awards.

On the women’s side, the player of the year race is probably a three-player deal between Westminster’s Nicole Yazzie and Cydney Tibbetts, Montana Tech’s Mandy Machinal and UM-Western’s Sammi Bignell. Bignell leads the Frontier in scoring at 16 points per game and is also among the league leaders in rebounding. But Tibbetts and Yazzie are both having strong season’s and they have the Griffins eyeing a run at the national championship.

UGF freshman guard Erin Legel, who is coming off a 23-point performance against the Skylights last week, has the inside track on freshman of the year honors, though a strong case could be made for MSU-N’s Kacie McKeon, while Carroll’s Megan Patterson and LC State’s Ornela Bacchini lead the way for newcomer of the year. Tech’s Kelsey DeWit and Northern’s Kylee Denham are two leaders in the defensive player of the year race. And at this point, there’s no doubt Westminster’s Shelly Jarrard is the front-runner for
coach of the year, though a case could be made for coaches like MSU-N’s Chris Mouat and Western’s Lindsey Wooley.

On the men’s said, the MVP race is tight, and the second half of the season will be needed to decide it. Obviously, UGF’s Marcel Towns is having a monster season, leading the league in scoring at 21 points per game. However, Montana Tech’s Adam Greger and LC State’s P.J. Bolte are double-double’s almost every night, and Northern senior Devin Jackson is having yet another steady season, like he’s done all four years at MSU-N.

Carroll’s Riley King and LCSC’s Trey Sobotta are both up for freshman of the year honors, though few true freshmen are playing this season, while Carroll’s Dennis Mikelonis, Tech’s Bryan Bock, and Northern’s Jesse Vaughan and Roshawn West are all prime candidates for newcomer of the year honors at the halfway point. Defensive honors could go to UGF’s James Holmes or Rocky Mountain College’s Joel Barndt at this point, while LCSC’s Brandon Rinta and Northern’s Shawn Huse are in a dead heat for coach of the year honors.

The Race is On

Things are going to get very interesting as the Frontier reaches the final month of the regular season.

The race to the Frontier men’s title is as tight as its been in a long time, as three games separate the top seven teams. LCSC is in the driver’s seat with two wins over the Lights, as well as wins over Westminster and UM-Western already. But the Warriors still have to trip to both Salt Lake City and Dillon in the second half of the season, so those games will be critical.

Northern is in a tough spot, and will need help to repeat as regular season champions. The Lights also play four of their last six games on the road, but last season, the Lights won four straight games to clinch a share of the league title, so doing that again isn’t out of the question. Westminster and Western and UGF are tied for fourth right now, but are only one game out of second, while Rocky and Tech sit at 4-5 and are only two games behind the Lights and three behind the Warriors.

The women’s race is somewhat less clouded with Westminster running away with the conference at 8-0. Carroll is 8-1 and the Griffins and Saints do play one more time so the regular season title will likely be decided in that game. Northern and Tech are tied for third right now, and those two team’s meet next week in Butte, with the winner of that game gaining the upper hand on hosting a playoff game. Western, Rocky and LCSC are also in a battle for what will likely be the final two playoff berths.