Skylights trump Orediggers in Butte

George Ferguson
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The Montana State University-Northern women’s basketball team has been road warriors of late. And the Skylights did their best to keep that going this past weekend.

Northern won its fourth straight game of the season, and third straight on the road by beating Montana Tech 56-47 Friday night in Butte. However, the winning streak came to an end Saturday night in Helena as the Skylights fell to the nationally-ranked Carroll College Fighting Saints, 56-44.

Still, a weekend road split left Northern at 7-5 in the Frontier Conference and still tied with Tech for third place. MSU-N hold all tiebreakers over the Orediggers however, after the Skylights made it a season sweep on Friday night.

“We’re really happy with this win,” Northern head coach Chris Mouat said from Butte on Friday night. “I thought we were really balanced on offense and we had a ton of kids step up and make big shots. We out-rebounded them (Orediggers), which is a huge plus for us, and overall, I felt like we defended really well.”

The Skylights did indeed defend well. Northern held the Diggers’ to under 50 points for the second time this season, something that’s not easy to do considering Tech has plenty of offensive firepower. The Skylights shut down shooting guard Mandy Machinal to the tune of just seven points, while Tech was also without the services of 6-2 center Kelsey DeWit, and that’s where MSU-N took advantage on the boards, out-rebounding a taller Tech team 33-30.

Offensively, the Skylights got good balance, and they used some hot shooting midway through the first half to build a 27-19 lead. Tech closed to within six points a couple of times in the second, but big shots by Kylee Denham, Nikki Tresch and Laci Keller helped MSU-N seal the road victory.

“We pretty much led wire to wire and that was nice to see,” Mouat said. “It was nice to see us play well with a lead. Tech hit some big shots in the second half, but we always seemed to answer with a big shot, then a big stop. Kylee Denham’s three’s in the second half were huge, and we had a lot of kids make big shots.

“I’m just really proud of our team,” he continued. “And we’re very pleased to get out of Butte with a win.”

Tresch hit three 3-pointers and scored 14 points, while Denham hit two bombs and scored 11 to along with eight boards. Keller added 10 points and Jordan Bruursema scored nine. The Skylights also shot a solid 6-of-18 from three.

Northern’s strong finish on Friday night was instrumental in helping the Skylights to a fourth straight win. But it was the finish Saturday night in Helena which ended MSU-N’s winning streak.

The Skylights were right where they wanted to be against 24th-ranked Carroll College, trailing just 23-22 at halftime. But the Saints opened the second half on an 11-2 run, and from there, Northern had to play catch-up the rest of the way.
Still, the Skylights bucked down on defense, and closed the gap to two points with only five minutes left in the contest. From there however, it was all Carroll as the Saints hit a couple of key three’s, and made clutch free throws to pull away from MSU-N down the stretch.

“We just couldn’t make a shot down the stretch,” Mouat said. “And give their (Saints) defense credit. They seemed to have us off balance a little bit. But bottom line is, we didn’t make shots when we needed them and Carroll did. They made big shots after big shot and we didn’t answer.”

Most of Carroll’s big shots came from senior guard Megan Patterson, who nailed four three’s on the night, and offset a solid and well-played first half by the Skylights. In all, Patterson scored a game-high 18 points, and she was too tough stop down the stretch.

MSU-N made on three trey’s total on the night and only Tresch reached double figures, scoring 11 points. Bruursema and Keller totaled seven points each in MSU-N’s second loss to the Saints this season.

“Megan Patterson had a big game,” Mouat said. “Defensively, we gave them too many open three’s and we fouled too much. And at the end, we just didn’t make shots down the stretch. Carroll has great shooters and you have to answer them and we didn’t do that at critical stretches of the game tonight.”

Still, a road split is always good and the Skylights (15-9) return home for their final two home games of the season in good shape. Northern plays host to UM-Western on Thursday night and will celebrate senior night against Westminster College on Saturday.

Skylights 56, Tech 47

**MSU-N** — Jordan Bruursema 4-7 0-0 9, Laci Keller 5-7 0-0 10, Nikki Tresch 3-12 5-6 14, Taylor Cummings 3-4 0-0 6, Kylee Denham 4-8 1-2 11, Kassie Barta 1-2 0-0 2, Kacie McKeon 0-4 0-0 0, Rachelle Bennett 0-0 0-0 0, Maurissa McKissic 2-2 0-0 4, Michaela Howe-Cobb 0-0 0-0 0. TOTALS: 22-46 6-8 56.

**MT** — Dannielle Devenny 6-11 0-0 14, Shaye Murphy 4-10 1-2 10, Brooke Pokorny 2-9 0-2 4, Mandy Machinal 3-11 0-0 7, Laini Kalumbi 2-6 1-2 5, Ivana Lacmanovic 0-1 0-0 0, Brynne Kambich 0-2 0-0 0, Erika Jenkins 3-6 0-0 7. TOTALS: 20-56 2-6 47.

Halftime score: Northern 27-19; 3-point field goals: MSUN 6-18 (Tresch 3-7, Denham 2-5, Bruursema 1), Tech 5-17 (Devenny 2-3, Jenkins 1-2, Machinal 1-4, Murphy 1-5); Rebounds: MSUN 33 (Denham 8), Tech 30 (Machinal 7); Total fouls: MSUN 12, Tech 9; Fouled Out: None.

Carroll 56, Skylights 44

**MSU-N** — Jordan Bruursema 1-6 4-4 7, Laci Keller 2-9 3-4 7, Nikki Tresch 3-10 3-4 11, Taylor Cummings 3-4 3-4 9, Kylee Denham 0-4 3-6 3, Kassie Barta 0-1 0-0 0, Kacie McKeon 0-3 0-0 0, Rachelle Bennett 1-3 2-2 4, Maurisha McKissic 1-1 1-2 3. Team totals – 11-41 19-26 44.

**CC** — Joey O’Neill 1-4 1-2 3, Torrie Cahill 2-7 6-11 10, Kalee Junkermier 2-5 3-4 7, Megan Patterson 6-13 2-2 18, Bailey Snelling 3-6 0-1 6, Katie Estey 2-2 0-3 5, Jordan Pfau 0-0 1-2 1, Jackie Gebhardt 0-0 0-0 0, Jordan Johnston 0-0 0-0 0, Jordan Bagley 2-6 2-2 6. Totals 18-43 15-27 56.

Halftime – Carroll 23, Northern 22; 3-pointers – MSU-N 3-12 (Bruursema 1-3, Tresch 2-5, Denham 0-1, McKeon 0-2, Barta 0-1); CC 5-10 (Junkermier 0-1, Patterson 4-7, Snelling 0-1, Estey 1-1). Rebounds – MSU-N 31 (Cummings 7), CC 37 (O’Neill 7, Cahill 7). Assists – MSU-N 2 (Bruursema, Cummings); CC 8 (O’Neill 3). Turnovers – MSU-N 15, CC 11. Personal fouls – MSU-N 19, CC 18. Fouled out – Denham. Technicals – none.