Skylights win debut
MSU-N women beat Lethbridge, face Mount Royal Sunday
By George Ferguson
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Playing a seasoned and experienced University of Lethbridge squad which was able to win in the Armory Gymnasium a year ago was going to be a tall order for the new-look Montana State University-Northern Skylights. However, the young Skylights found a way to turn the tables on the Pronghorns.

The Northern women opened their 2013-14 season with a 53-43 win over Lethbridge Thursday night at the Armory Gymnasium. And while the win didn't come easy, and the Skylights shot just 29 percent from the field and made one 3-pointer, head coach Chris Mouat was plenty pleased with how his team responded to the difficult season-opener.

"We're a young team, we had some first-game jitters, and it showed," Mouat said. "We didn't shoot it well at all and we have to do a much better job of making free throws. And Lethbridge is tough. A lot of that was how well they defend and how good they are."

"But on the flip side, we found ways to overcome a lot of that," he continued. "Our physical effort tonight was great. We made a lot of nice hustle plays, and to limit them (Horns') to 43 points was very good. And offensively, we found ways to go on a couple of nice runs and that was the difference. So it wasn't a pretty win, but it's a win and we'll take it and go back to work."

The Skylights fell behind early, in what was a low-scoring start to the game as neither team could find much rhythm on offense. But trailing 23-18 with three minutes left in the half, Northern finally perked up. MSU-N ripped off the final 11 points of the half, including a three from Kassie Barta just before the buzzer, and the Skylights led 29-23 at the break.

Northern extended that lead via a 14-0 run early in the second stanza. Rachelle Bennett, who played very well in the first half, made back-to-back buckets to spurn the run, then, true freshman Natalee Faupel scored eight straight points, giving the Skylights a commanding 45-30 lead with just over eight minutes left in the contest.

"Kassie's three at the end of the first half was big," Mouat said. "It gave us a little more of a cushion. But overall, we had a lot of different kids step up tonight. I thought Megan Feldman's defense was really good in the second half. She did a great job and that kind of got us going. Natalee Faupel played really well during that run, and A'Jah Edwards did a nice job on both ends tonight. It was good to see so many different kids step up when we kind of needed them to."

The talented Pronghorns responded with an 8-0 run of their own, but they wouldn't get any closer than seven points. Defensively, Northern limited Lethbridge standout Kim Veldman to just 11 points on 5-of-20 shooting, while the Horns' committed nine turnovers in the second half and shot just 30 percent from the floor. MSU-N also won the battle of the boards, out-rebounding the Horns' 48-40.
"Again, our physical effort was really good," Mouat said. "The kids really played hard. They got after it on the defensive end and did a nice job on the boards. I was really pleased with our effort tonight."

Edwards finished with a double-double for Northern, scoring 13 points and grabbing 11 rebounds. Bennett chipped in with 11, while Taylor Cummings had nine and Faupel scored eight. Veldman and Katelyn Olson paced the Horns', who played UM-Western down to the wire last weekend, with 11 points each.

Now off to a 1-0 start, Northern will remain at home to face another Canadian stalwart when the Skylights host Mount Royal University on Sunday at 3:30 p.m.

"We'll need to shoot it better, and we will," Mouat said. "It was the first game, and we will get better. Lethbridge was a good team for us to play because they are very solid on both ends of the floor and force you into some tough situations. So it was nice for us to be tested tonight and to find a way to come out with a win."

**Skylights 53, Lethbridge 43**

**UL** – Mariah Miller 4-8 0-1 8, Kim Veldman 5-20 1-4 11, Sara Simovic 2-6 2-4 6, Erin James 2-5 2-2 6, Katlyn Olsen 4-9 1-2 11, Taylor Crozon 1-5 0-0 3. Totals: 18-56 6-13 43.

**MSU-N** – A'Jah Edwards 6-8 1-4 13, Taybra Teeters 0-3 0-0 0, Kacie McKeon 0-5 3-4 3, Rachelle Bennett 3-10 5-6 11, Taylor Cummings 2-4 5-9 9, Kassie Barta 2-9 1-2 6, Natalee Faupel 2-10 4-4 8, Megan Feldman 0-1 0-0 0, Molly Kreycik 1-4 0-3 2. Totals: 16-54 19-32 53.