The Montana State University-Northern women's basketball team passed its first road test with flying colors last weekend in Spokane, Wash. But, the next two road games for the Skylights will be unlike anything they'll see the rest of the season.

Northern (4-0) strikes out to play a pair of NCAA Division I powers this weekend, starting with a game against the University of Wyoming Cowgirls tonight in Sheridan, Wyo. Northern then comes back to Montana to face the University of Montana Lady Griz in Missoula Sunday afternoon.

And while both games will be exhibitions for Northern, both games are the official season-openers for the Skylights' opponents, and that means both teams will be in full form against MSU-N.

"These games give us a chance to grow," MSU-N head coach Chris Mouat said. "We are looking at it as a great opportunity to play against two of the top NCAA teams in the West. We are going to need to play extremely hard and take care of the basketball, and rebound at both ends. And, we'll be in a position where execution on offense is vital."

Under Mouat, the Skylights are no strangers to playing the Lady Griz, but Wyoming, which won the Mountain West Conference three years ago, is a new foe. The Cowgirls return two starters from a team which went 20-8 a year ago and went to the Women's NIT. Wyoming is picked to finish second in the MWC conference this season and should be an NCAA tournament team come March.

"Wyoming is an outstanding team and they run very good motion," Mouat said. "They can all shoot it from three and are very potent offensively. I expect it to be a real tough environment playing at Sheridan College, as the Cowgirls have two players who played there in junior college, and one girl from Sheridan High School. They have a great program and are coming off of a 24-8 season, so we know we will be in for a tough, tough matchup."

Leading the way for the Cowgirls is 5-11 forward Kayla Woodward, who averaged 14 points per game a year ago, while 5-10 junior guard Kaitlyn Mileto averaged 11. True freshman Kaylie Radar is a star in the making, and standing 6-4, she'll go head-to-head with Northern junior A'Jha Edwards, who leads the Skylights in scoring and rebounding.

And if things aren't tough enough tonight, they'll be just as difficult when Northern goes into Dahlberg Arena Sunday in Missoula for the Lady Griz' season-opener. Montana went 24-8 a year ago on its way to the Big Sky championship and an NCAA Tournament berth. Included in those 24 wins was a 75-45 win against MSU-N. In all, the Skylights have faced the powerful Lady Griz in four of the last five seasons, and Sunday will be another learning experience for a young MSU-N club.

"We know what we are up against, as we've played at Montana quite a few times over the years," Mouat said. "They are athletic, strong, and tough. They execute and always seem to shoot it very well in Dahlberg.
Torry Hill and Jordan Sullivan are outstanding seniors for them, and they have a ton of talent around them."

Indeed, Hill and Sullivan play an excellent inside-out game together, but the Lady Griz' size will really come into play against Northern. Carly Selvig (6-2), Maggie Rickman (6-0) and Shanae Gilham (5-11) are all strong in the post, but can also step out and shoot it.

But as tough as both games will be for the Skylights, neither will count against Northern's unbeaten start to the season. And coming off a strong win over Eastern Oregon last Friday, Northern will use both exhibition games as a way to build and get better, especially with more difficult non-conference games, and a Frontier opener with Carroll College on the horizon.

"Both games will be tough," Mouat said. "But we can get better from having played these two great programs. We want to win both games. We want to win every game. But we also want to make sure we learn, grow and take positives away from each game."

Tonight's game against Wyoming in Sheridan will tip off at 8. Saturday's game between the Skylights and Montana will begin at 2 p.m. in Missoula.