Neither of the Montana State University-Northern women's basketball team's road games this past week were going to count towards MSU-N's season record. Never-the-less, they were going to be simply two of the toughest games MSU-N would play all year, and for that reason, two of the most important.

On Friday night, Northern fell to NCAA Division I power the University of Wyoming, 71-57 in Sheridan, Wyo. And on Sunday, MSU-N dropped a road game in Missoula, losing to defending Big Sky Conference champion Montana, 76-49.

Both games were exhibition games for Northern (4-0), but both were season-openers for the Cowgirls (1-0) and Lady Griz (1-0), and that meant the Skylights were facing the full force of both squads.

"We knew these were going to be two really big challenges for our team, and they were," Northern head coach Chris Mouat said. "Hopefully, we can learn from both games and get better for having played them. Both teams are very, very good, very, very talented and extremely well coached. So the goal was to get better from these two experiences and I think we will."

The Skylights certainly learned about themselves on Friday night in Wyoming. The Cowgirls were an NIT team a year ago and are picked to finish second in the tough Mountain West Conference this year. But MSU-N was not intimidated, and the Skylights hung in with Wyoming most of the way.

Northern played an exceptional first half, and trailed the Cowgirls just 35-29 at halftime of a game that was played in front of a sold-out crowd in Sheridan. In the second half, Northern's defense continued to play well, and the Skylights found themselves trailing by just five points with under eight minutes to go. Wyoming's talent did help the Cowgirls pull away late, but MSU-N really rose to the challenge according to Mouat.

"I was very excited about the way we played, especially defensively," Mouat said. "They (Cowgirls) are a very good offensive team, very explosive and athletic, but I thought we were really hung in there and did a great job defensively. We played well enough to give ourselves a chance down the stretch, and in a game like this, that's all you can ask for. I was really pleased with how we played on Friday night."

A'Jha Edwards paced the Skylights with 17 points and four rebounds, while Kassie Barta came off the bench to bury three 3-pointers and score 15. Kacie McKeon also hit three of Northern's seven trey's and scored 10 points, while the Skylights hung tough on the boards, with 30 to Wyoming's 34. The Cowgirls got a game-high 27 points from star Kaitlyn Mileto.

But as good as the experience was on Friday night, as Northern pushed an NCAA power to the brink, things were the exact opposite Sunday at famed Dahlberg Arena in Missoula.

The Lady Griz jumped all over the Skylights in front a large crowd, and never let Northern into the game.

In the first half, Montana ripped off a 17-0 run, made its first five 3-pointers and was also perfect from the free-throw-line. All that led to a 49-20 halftime deficit for the Skylights, and a hole they just couldn't climb out of.
"They (Griz) were very good," Mouat said. "And as well as we played on Friday night, we played that poorly defensively today. But all the credit goes to Montana. They jumped on us quick, they are big and talented, they are quick and they can shoot it really well from three. They have it all, and they kind of overwhelmed us right from the start.

"I'd like to have seen us play better," he continued. "Because I thought we played so well against Wyoming. But Montana is really good, they are so well-coached and they always play well at home."

Northern did outscore the Lady Griz in the second half, but it was too-little-too-late as the Skylights lost to UM for third time in the last four seasons. Edwards again led MSU-N with 10 points and 10 rebounds, while Rachelle Bennett scored 11 and Natalee Faupel chipped in with eight points off the bench. The Lady Griz, who shot 50 percent from the field, got a balanced effort, led by Jordan Sullivan's 12 points and Torrey Hill's 11.

And thought it was a blowout from start-to-finish, as always, longtime UM head coach Robin Selvig was impressed with Mouat's Skylights.

"Northern has a good team," Selvig told the Missoulian. "They just played Wyoming real tough, and we know Wyoming is real good, so I was expecting this to be much more of a battle.

"But I thought we really came right out of the gates. We shot it well, and it's always fun to make shots. I was pretty pleased with the whole effort."

The Skylights didn't play as well as they could have in Missoula, but with their two exhibition experiences now in tow, they'll go back to their regular schedule and get ready for tough games against Pacific Union and NCAA DII Nebraska-Kearney this weekend in Great Falls.

"As long as we learn from this game and get better," Mouat said. "That's what matters. We pretty much played two opposite games this weekend, but the point is to prepare us for the rest of the season, and especially for conference play. So hopefully, we learn from these games and are a better team going forward."

Northern plays Pacific Union Friday at 2 p.m. and Nebraska-Kearney Saturday at 3 p.m. Both games will be at Paris Gibson School in Great Falls.

**Wyoming 71, Skylights 57**

**MSU-N** - A'Jha Edwards 7-12 3-3 17, Taybra Teeters 0-1 0-0 0, Kacie McKeon 3-7 1-2 10, Rachelle Bennett 0-2 0-0 0, Taylor Cummings 3-10 2-2 9, Kassie Barta 6-10 0-0 15, Natalie Faupel 0-0 0-0 0, Megan Feldman 1-1 4-4 6, Molly Kreyck 0-3 0-0 0. Totals: 20-46 10-11 57. 3-point goals: 7-12 (McKeon 3-3, Barta 3-6, Cummings 1-2, Kreyck 0-1). Fouls: 19. Rebounds: 30 (Feldman 5). Assists: 7 (McKeon 2, Bennett 2). Steals: 5. Blocks: 0. Turnovers: 18.


**Montana 76, Skylights 49**

**MSU-N** - f-Edwards 30 4-13 2-2 10 2 0 10; f-Teeters 16 1-6 0-0 3 5 0 2; g-McKeon 15 1-6 1-2 1 2 1 4; g-Bennett 32 4-8 3-3 5 11 11; g-Cummings 33 1-4 0-0 7 0 1 2; Barta 21 2-6 0-0 1 4 1 6; Faupel 16 3-5 1-2 2 1 0 8; Feldman 16 0-1 0-0 1 4 2 0; Norby 3 1-2 0-0 1 0 0 0 3; Kreyck 13 0-1 0-0 1 0 1 0; Powers 5 1-2 0-0 0 0 0 0 3; Totals 200 18-54 7-9 32 19 7 49.

**UM** - f-Selvig 16 1-3 0-0 5 1 2 3; f-Sullivan 22 4-7 3-3 5 3 1 12; f-Rickman 20 0-3 6-6 5 0 6; g-Hill 20 4-10 0-0 1 1 4 11; g-Cole 22 4-8 0-0 1 0 2 10; Vining 12 1-4 0-0 0 1 3 3; Feller 16 2-7 0-0 2 1 1 4; Valley
Halftime score: Montana 49, MSU-N 20. 3-point goals: MSU-N 6-18 (Barta 2-6, Powers 1-2, Norby 1-2, Faupel 1-2, McKeon 1-4, Edwards 0-1, Bennett 0-1), UM 10-29 (Hill 3-7, Cole 2-3, Doran 2-5, Selvig 1-1, Sullivan 1-2, Vining 1-3, Valley 0-1, Rickman 0-2, Staudacher 0-2, Feller 0-3).