After a perfect 4-0 start to the season, the Montana State University-Northern women’s basketball team turned in another impressive showing on the road over the weekend.

Playing in Great Falls, the Skylights took on two non-conference opponents and improved to 6-0.

At the preseason tournament hosted by UGF in Great Falls, the Skylights recorded two big wins. Friday, Northern defeated the Pacific Union Pioneers 78-58. Saturday, Northern remained in Great Falls where the Skylights defeated the NCAA DII Nebraska-Kearney Loopers 73-57. After coming off of a couple tough exhibition losses prior to the weekend, the Skylights really turned in two very strong outings.

“We knew that, going into Friday’s game, that Pacific Union was better than their record showed,” Skylights’ head coach Chris Mouat said. “We had seen them a ton on film, and then I think they showed that against UGF the next day. That was a big game, and coming off of a couple big losses (exhibition) we knew we had to play well and regroup. We had to do that because we knew Kearney was going to be a tough game too. For us to come out and play like we did, and to get the balance that we did after a tough start was good to see. The kids are happy and definitely earned these two wins.”

Friday’s win over the Pioneers came from some hot shooting and great defense by the Skylights.

Both teams came out of the gate hot and were putting up points fast. It looked a game where the team with the final shot would take the win, but the Skylights had other ideas. A tight game early quickly turned into a runaway win for the Skylights as they led 45-29 at the break. A’Jha Edwards paced the offense with 25 points and Rachelle Bennett kicked in another 12 as MSU-N went on to outscore the Pioneers 33-29 in the second half of action. Edwards also had 18 rebounds and Bennett had 12 boards as they helped keep the offense rolling all game long.

The defense was also strong, as the Skylights gave up a lot of points early, but quickly locked down the Pioneers’ efforts.

“It took us making a bunch of shots because they hit a lot tough, tough shots on us early,” Mouat said. “They were drilling everything and it really was a grind early. Something had to give, and thankfully our defense held up and we continued to knock down shots because it was a real battle.”

Edwards had two blocks, while the Skylights combined for seven steals and forced the Pioneers into 11 total turnovers.

The defensive presence by the Skylights was strong all weekend. MSU-N held the opposition to a combined 115 points, and that speaks volumes, seeing as one of those teams was a NCAA DII program.

“We were good on defense all weekend,” Moutat said. “By and large, to keep two teams in the 50s, most of the time you are doing well if you can do that. We slowed the pace of the games down a bit with our defense and our offense, and we really tried to take good shots on offense, and made teams earn everything they got with our defense.”
The hot shooting by the Skylights didn’t immediately roll over into Saturday’s game against the DII Loopers, but the second strong showing by the defense did allow the Skylights eventually to run away with another victory.

Starting out, the Skylights scored just three points in the opening six minutes. That could typically sink a team early, but the MSU-N defense was just as vicious, allowing just three points through the first six minutes. But the offense eventually got hot again as they finished the first half shooting 37 percent from the field and with a 32-23 lead.

The Skylight shooters didn’t change a thing. They continued to run their offense as planned, and quickly turned things around. The shots the offense was taking were good shots on good possessions, but they just weren’t going in. But a spark from Northern’s Kacie McKeon turned the contest around. McKeon rallied for a game-high 24 points.

"I told our kids that they needed to make shots because we have a chance to jump these guys," Mouat said. "We were missing everything, we were missing layups, threes, open shots, and a couple of free throws. Opportunities were there for us and we were just leaving the door open, and against a good team, you can’t do that. And to get going Kacie McKeon gave us a huge jump start and after she got going, everybody else fed off of her."

Taylor Cummings added 13 and five rebounds, while Molly Kreycik and Edwards added seven points each. The offense finished shooting 40 percent from the field and 46 percent from 3-point range, capping off two knights of well-balanced basketball.

"Our balance was good both nights," Mouat said. "And our bench was strong. We were just trying to get better, and it gets really busy for us now, so we have to continue to learn from these experiences."

The Skylights have a week off before traveling to Billings to face MSU-Billings Nov. 27. Northern returns home to host Carroll College in a Frontier Conference opener on Nov. 30.

**Skylights 78, Pacific Union 58**

**MSU-N** – A’Jha Edwards 11-19 3-4 25, Taybra Teeters 1-4 0-0 2, Kacie McKeon 2-5 2-3 7, Rachelle Bennett 2-10 14-14 18, Taylor Cummings 0-3 0-0 0, Kassie Barta 3-5 0-0 8, Natalee Faupel 1-3 2-2 4, Megan Feldman 5-9 2-2 12, Molly Kreycik 0-0 2-4 2. Totals: 25-58 25-32 78.

**Pacific Union** – Haley Ryals 3-9 0-0 6, Amber Washington 3-8 5-7 11, Victoria Aquilera 5-14 1-1 13, Rachel Kaneakua 3-5 0-0 8, Verleah Jones 1-3 0-0 2, Brittany Stegall 1-3 0-0 3, De’Ja Conger 0-1 0-0 0, Alexia Martin 0-0 0-0 0, Lidia Rivas 1-2 0-0 3, London Robinson 6-11 0-2 12, Kyra Navarrete 0-0 0-0 0. Totals: 23-56 6-10 58.

Halftime: Skylights 45, Pacific Union 29

**Skylights 73, Nebraska-Kearney 57**

**N-K** – Nicole Arp 0-6 1-3 1, Laramey Lewis 1-7 0-0 2, Sarah Hicks 3-7 0-0 7, Shelby Zimmerman 6-10 2-3 14, Amarah Williams 5-7 2-6 12, Alexa Hogberf 1-3 0-0 3, Sydney Seberger 2-9 3-1 6, Tori Payne 1-2 0-0 2, Kelsey Fitzgerald 2-3 0-1 4, Chantal Thomas 2-3 1-1 5. Totals: 23-57 7-16.

**MSU-N** – Megan Feldman 1-6 0-1 2, A’Jha Edwards 2-7 3-4 7, Kacie McKeon 8-13 3-3 24, Rachelle Bennett 1-6 2-2 4, Taylor Cummings 1-6 11-12 13, Kassie Barta 2-3 0-0 6, Natalee Faupel 1-2 3-4 5, Taryn Norby 0-0 1-2 1, Molly Kreycik 2-2 3-4 7, Taybra Teeters 2-4 0-0 4. Totals: 20-49 26-32.

Halftime: MSU Northern 32, Nebraska Kearney 23.