There’s no mistaking the fact that the Carroll College Fighting Saints were a thorn in the Montana State University-Northern Skylights’ side a year ago. But after suffering three losses at the hands of the Saints last season, the Skylights pulled the thorn out in their Frontier Conference opener.

Northern overcame a defensive slugfest in the first half, going on a 14-2 run in the second half and put forth a stellar defensive effort in beating the Saints 52-42 in front of a huge crowd Saturday night at the Armory Gymnasium.

The win pushed the Skylights to 1-0 in league play and kept them perfect on the season. MSU-N is now 7-0 heading into the rest of its non-conference schedule.

"Just very proud of our kids," Northern head coach Chris Mouat said. "Tonight was a grinder, especially losing Kacie (McKeon) before the game even started. Carroll is a great defensive team, really a great team. But our kids really stuck with it tonight, really fought hard I thought. And fortunately, we did just enough to win."

McKeon, a sophomore starting guard, hurt an ankle during pre-game, which meant other Skylights would have to step up. And step up they did. Neither team scored in the first five minutes, and the first half was a defensive battle. However, behind two quick buckets from Rachelle Bennett and another by Megan Feldman, who really shined on Saturday night, the Skylights went on a 7-2 run, and with a late basket by freshman Natalee Faupel, Northern took a slim 21-17 lead into halftime.

"Both teams played very good defense, all night," Mouat said. "It was a real defensive grinder for a long period the game. They (Saints) knew us well and we knew them well, and it was really tough to get any shots, especially in the first half. Baskets were just very hard to come by for both teams."

They were indeed. Carroll held Northern to just 37 percent shooting, but the Skylights were even better, holding the Saints to a dismal 30 percent for the night. Northern also out-rebounded the Saints 34-32, and the 14-2 run in the second half was crucial.

With the game knotted at 27-27, Feldman scored back-to-back buckets in the lane, and Bennett added a layup of her own. Then, reserve senior Kassie Barta knocked down Northern’s only 3-pointer of the night, and added a layup of her own. Then, reserve senior Kassie Barta knocked down Northern’s only 3-pointer of the night, and added scores by Taylor Cummings and Feldman gave MSU-N a commanding 41-29 lead with 6:03 left in the game.

And with how Northern was executing on defense, Carroll struggled to mount any type of a comeback in the final five minutes.
"We just stayed positive," Feldman said. "We knew eventually the shots would start going in. We just stayed together, as a team. This team is so bonded. This win feels great."

"I thought we just really kept battling on defense, and on the boards," Mouat added. "And, fortunately, we made enough shots to get us over the hump in the second half. We did just enough to get over the hump, and once we did, the crowd really helped us close it out. The crowd was just amazing tonight."

Feldman, the junior transfer from Estacada, Ore., poured in a game-high 15 points while grabbing four rebounds. She connected on 7-of-8 shot attempts and made one of MSU-N's 16 free throws. Bennett added 10 points, while Cummings scored eight and Barta chipped in with five off the bench. But, in all, it was a total team effort which, especially given the Skylights were without the sharp-shooting McKeon, helped knock off the Saints in the Armory Thanksgiving weekend.

"So many kids stepped up big for us tonight," Mouat said. "Megan Feldman had a huge game, Natalee Faupel did not play like a true freshman tonight. She had to start, and she played really well. And we put a lot on Rachelle Bennett tonight, and she really did a great job. It was a great team effort."

"This is a good win for us," he continued. "It's good to get this one under our belt, and it's something we can build on. It certainly will give us some confidence heading into some more tough games in December, and then when we start conference play again in January."

The Skylights return to the road to face Alberta-Augustana next Friday-Saturday. MSU-N hadn't played a home game before Saturday night since Oct. 27, and the Skylights won't be back at home until the Duck Inn Holiday Classic Dec. 19-21.

**Skylights are 1-0 in the Frontier, 7-0 overall; Up Next: at Augustana on Friday**

Skylights 52, Carroll 42

**CC** – Baylee Watson 1-1 2-2 3, Jordan Bagley 0-2 2-2 2, Kalee Junkermeier 4-10 1-1 9, Bailey Snelling 5-12 2-2 15, Katie Estey 0-7 1-4 1, Jordan Pfau 1-5 2-2 4, Allison Sullivan 1-2 0-0 2, Kaye Bignell 1-1 2-2 4. Totals: 13-43 11-16 42.

**MSU-N** – Megan Feldman 7-8 1-1 15, A’Jha Edwards 2-9 2-3 6, Natalee Faupel 2-6 1-2 5, Rachelle Bennett 3-13 4-4 10, Taylor Cummings 2-7 4-6 8, Kassie Barta 1-4 2-2 5, Molly Kreyck 0-1 2-2 2, Taybra Teeters 0-1 0-0 0. Totals: 17-49 16-21 52.

Halftime: Northern 21-17. 3-pointers: MSU-N 1-12 (Barta 1), CC 3-16 (Snelling 3); Rebounds: MSU-N 34 (Edwards 7), CC 32 (Estey 6); Fouls: MSU-N 14, CC 26; Fouled out: Watson, Junkermeier.