Skylights ground Eagles
Unbeaten MSU-N women close out the Duck Inn Holiday Classic with a 3-point barrage against NW Indian College
By George Ferguson
December 23, 2013

On opening night of the 2013 Duck Inn Holiday Classic, the Montana State University-Northern women’s basketball team was red-hot from the 3-point line. In the final game of the three-day tournament, the Skylights were record-setting from beyond the arc.

Against an over-matched Northwest Indian College squad, which hailed from Bellingham, Wash., Saturday night in the Armory Gymnasium, the Skylights poured in a school-record 14 3-pointers, including six from senior guard Kassie Barta. The 3-point barrage, in which Barta nailed five in the second half, helped lift the No. 24 Skylights to a 94-33 victory, their 11th of the season. Northern’s 14 three’s on Saturday night broke the previous record of 13 three’s in a game, which the Skylights set in 2011 against Dickinson State.

“It was fun to see us shoot it like that,” Northern head coach Chris Mouat said. “The bottom line is, we got open looks tonight, we shared the ball really well, and we made a lot of shots. A lot of kids got involved.

“Kassie Barta really got hot, and that happens,” he continued. “When she makes one, she can really get on a roll. Natalee (Faupel) really got it going early in the second half, too. She’s playing really well right now, and she’s certainly not playing like a true freshman.”

Northern made it look easy from all over the floor Saturday night, not just from long distance. But Faupel’s three to open the game was surely a sign of things to come.

MSU-N quickly led 11-0, then back-to-back triples by Barta and Taylor Cummings capped a 9-0 run which pushed MSU-N in front 20-4 with only 11 minutes gone by. Ultimately, the Skylights would outscore the Eagles 21-2 in a seven-minute stretch and, for good measure, they finished the half with three’s by Rachelle Bennett and Cummings, and on a 10-0 run.

But the 42-10 halftime lead didn’t just come by way of the offense. The Skylights, who lead the NAIA in scoring defense, bottled up the Eagles in the first half, and much of MSU-N’s explosive offense was a result of its stellar defensive effort.

“We came out and defended really well right away,” Mouat said. “I thought we were a little sloppy early on offense, but our defense was ready to go right away, and that allowed us to get off to a really good start. We got some steals, we got out in transition and all our kids were running the floor really hard. I thought we showed really good energy on the defensive end again tonight.”

And the first 20 minutes were only a prelude to what would be an incredible second half. The Eagles never gave up, but they had no answer for Northern’s shooters. The Skylights buried 10 trey’s in the final 20
minutes, with Barta knocking in five of her six in an eight-minute stretch. For the game, Northern shot 45 percent from the floor and 50 percent from three. The MSU-N defense forced the Eagles into 23 turnovers, while the Skylights out-rebounded the smaller Eagles 53-26. In all, Northern’s defense allowed a grand total of 57 points in its two Duck Inn Classic games.

Offensively, Barta finished with a career-high 23 points on 7-of-13 shooting. Faupel also totaled a career-high score 22 points with four made three’s. Cummings finished with 12 points and A’Jha Edwards racked up another double-double, scoring 10 points and grabbing 11 rebounds. Bennett added seven points and Megan Feldman chipped in with eight boards. NWIC got 11 points by Jolene Nagy.

Saturday night’s win over the Eagles pushed the Skylights’ overall record to a perfect 11-0. Northern has just two non-league games left, as the Skylights will travel to Las Vegas for a pair of games Dec. 27-28. Northern opens Frontier Conference play Jan. 2 at Rocky Mountain College, and as Christmas break approaches, Mouat says his team is playing well, and getting close to being ready for the rigors of the Frontier.

“I like the way our kids are playing right now,” Mouat said. “I’m proud of our defense. tonight, and on Thursday night. We really defended well for a full 40 minutes tonight. I’m very happy with where we’re at right now.”

Skylights are 12-0 overall; Next Up: at Las Vegas Dec. 27-28

Skylights 94, NW Indian 33

**NWIC** – Elizabeth Isaacs 3-13 2-2 8, Krista Colvin 3-8 3-4 10, Jolene Nagy 5-10 0-0 11, Vina Brown 1-8 2-2 4. Totals: 12-49 8-10 33.

**MSU-N** – Megan Feldman 2-6 0-0 4, A’Jha Edwards 4-8 2-2 10, Natalee Faupel 8-16 2-2 22, Rachelle Bennett 3-10 0-0 7, Taylor Cummings 4-8 2-2 12, Kassie Barta 7-13 3-4 23, Molly Kreycik 2-3 1-2 6, Taryn Norby 2-5 1-2 5, Taybra Teeters 2-6 1-2 5, Jordan Powers 0-1 0-0 0. Totals: 34-75 12-16 94.

Halftime: Northern 40-10. 3-pointers: MSU-N 14-28 (Faupel 4, Bennett 1, Cummings 2, Barta 6, Kreycik 1), NWIC 1-13 (Colvin 1); Rebounds: MSU-N 53 (Edwards 11, Feldman 8), NWIC 26 (Isaacs 6); Fouls: MSU-N 12, NWIC 13; Fouled out: None.