Skylights shoot down Blue Hawks
By George Ferguson
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Playing great defense is nothing new to the Montana State University-Northern women’s basketball team. Even holding opponents under 50 points has been a trend for the Skylights so far this season.

But when a team plays great defense and explodes on the offensive end, the results are devastating. And that’s exactly what the No. 24 Skylights were to upstart Dickinson State on Saturday afternoon in Dickinson, N.D., devastating.

Behind a combined 12 3-pointers from Natalee Faupel and Kassie Barta, MSU-N beat the Blue Hawks 82-43 to improve to 3-0 in Frontier Conference play, as well as complete an important road sweep. Northern also edged Rocky Mountain College Thursday night in Billings.

“It was really nice to see the ball go in the hole the way it did,” MSU-N head coach Chris Mouat said. “That was the biggest change from Thursday night. I know we were really good on defense again, and I thought we rebounded it fairly well. But we just made more shots. A lot more shots, and that was great to see.”

Northern jumped all over the Blue Hawks, scoring the game’s first eight points, with A’Jha Edwards dominating in the paint. And the Skylights didn’t let up. While MSU-N was knocking in shots from all over the floor in the first half, the Skylight defense was locking down a DSU squad which was averaging 72 points per game coming into Saturday’s battle. Northern held the Blue Hawks to just 21 percent shooting in the first half, and the Skylights led 41-18 at the break.

“Dickinson is a very scrappy team, they play really hard and rebound really well,” Mouat said. “And they were scoring a lot of points coming into the game. So to hold them down the way we did, to rebound as well as we did, that was just a great effort by our kids.

“And we just kind of jumped them at the start,” he added. “A’Jha got us off to a great start, and everybody fed off that. We made some shots early, and we never really looked back. We just played very, very well.”

MSU-N continued its torrid shooting pace in the second half, and for the game, the Skylights shot a sizzling 60 percent from the field and made 13 3-pointers. Faupel, a true freshman, came up big for the second straight outing, scoring 23 points with six triples. Barta also made six three’s for the second time this season and finished with 20 points, while Edwards was 7-of-9 from the floor for 16 points to go along with eight rebounds. Defensively, the Skylights held DSU to just 31 percent shooting, while the Blue Hawks (2-1, 12-6) committed 18 turnovers. Jess Bygate scored a team-high 15 points as the only Blue Hawks to reach double figures.

With the win, Northern remained tied with Lewis-Clark State and Westminster for the early Frontier lead, and the weekend sweep should solidify the Skylights’ position in the NAIA Top 25. But to Mouat, it was also big because Dickinson State is a quality opponent and his team was able to play one of its best games of the season on the Blue Hawk’s home floor.

“Winning on the road in this league is big, it’s very important,” Mouat said. “Any time you can steal one on the road is huge, but we were able to get two this weekend, and that is really important.”
“We knew this trip was going to be tough,” he added, “and I thought our kids responded well to that. They were really prepared and really focused. They played really well, especially at Dickinson and I’m very proud of them for that. It was a good trip.”

The Skylights (13-2) will return home to host the UM-Western Bulldogs Thursday night. Northern will host nationally ranked Westminster College Saturday night.

**Skylights are 3-0 in Frontier, 13-2 overall; Next Up: Vs UM-Western Thursday**

**Skylights 82, Dickinson St.43**

**MSU-N** – Kassie Barta 6-9 2-2 20, Natalee Faupel 7-11 3-6 23, Rachelle Bennett 2-4 0-0 4, Taylor Cummings 0-4 2-2 2, Megan Feldman 1-3 3-4 5, Taryn Norby 1-2 0-0 2, Molly Kreycik 2-2 0-0 5, A’Iha Edwards 7-9 2-3 16, Taybra Teeters 2-3 1-2 5. Totals: 28-47 13-19 82.

**DSU** – Mesha Phillips 0-4 0-0 0, Alyssa Hildebrand 0-4 0-0 0, Ja’Lisa Gatlin 4-8 0-0 8, JaiDah Richardson 0-1 0-0 0, Mariah Duran 2-5 0-0 6, TaRicka Linzy 1-7 1-3 3, Racheal McDonough 1-2 0-0 2, Hannah Beede 1-4 0-0 3, Jess Bygate 7-15 1-2 15, Porsha Wadsworth 1-5 2-2 4, Jalyn Klauzer 1-3 0-0 2. Totals: 18-58 4-7 43.

Halftime: Northern 41-18. 3-pointers: MSU-N 13-22 (Barta 6, Faupel 6, Kreycik 1), DSU 3-10 (Duran 2, Beede 1). Rebounds: MSU-N 25 (Edwards 8), DSU 33 (Degel); Fouls: MSU-N 11, DSU 17. Fouled out: None.