Montana State University-Northern Skylights play great defense. That’s no secret. But the Skylights are also known for starting strong. However, on the road, against a nationally ranked Frontier Conference rival, it was a bad start which doomed MSU-N.

Saturday night in Lewiston, Idaho, the No. 17 Skylights fell behind the No. 14 Lewis-Clark State Warriors by 20 points in the first half and, ultimately, the start resulted in an 80-68 loss for MSU-N. The Warriors (9-1, 22-2) dealt the Skylights just their third loss in league play. MSU-N will return home with a 7-3 Frontier record and, with Thursday night’s dramatic win at the University of Great Falls, the Skylights are 17-5 and still firmly entrenched in the top half of the league standings.

Despite the loss in Idaho Saturday night, the Skylights can come home with some positive momentum as well. MSU-N started the second half of the game with the Warriors on a 17-4 run, cutting the Warriors’ 45-25 halftime edge all the way down to five points with 13 minutes left in the contest.

“You can’t get off to a start like we did,” MSU-N head coach Chris Mouat said. “You can’t fall behind by 20 points at a place like this, against a nationally ranked team. We really shot ourselves in the foot from the get-go. We missed wide open threes, wide open layups and we missed free throws. And credit LC, too. They hit some shots on us early and really took advantage of every mistake we made in the first half.

“I was very proud of how we played in the second half,” he continued. “We showed some real grit to fight back the way we did. We cut the lead down to five and gave ourselves a chance. So I’m very proud of the way we played in the second half.”

While Tanis Fuller, who scored a game-high 24 points on 8-of-10 shooting and an 8-of-10 performance from the free-throw-line, and Loree Hill got the Warriors off to a hot start and the first half, which led to a 20-point halftime lead, MSU-N got the same in the first seven minutes of the second half. Kassie Barta and Kacie McKeon hit big 3-pointers for the Skylights early in the second stanza, while A’Jha Edwards got to the Warriors on the interior. Taylor Cummings and Natalee Faupel also knocked down key buckets during the run as the Skylights narrowed the game to 49-44 with 12:51 to play.

From there however, the Warriors again started to pull away, and though the Skylights continued to fight, they couldn’t quite get over the final hump.

“They (Warriors) were very good tonight,” Mouat said. “They really won the game in the first half, because they just played really, really well. They were playing really well and we knew we’d have to be sharp at the start and we weren’t. Against a team like LC, you have to get off to a better start, especially at their place, and we weren’t able to do that tonight. But credit them, they played really well.”

The Warriors shot a solid 46 percent from the floor, and four three’s in the first half were big. LCSC also pressed the Skylights for 40 minutes and forced 15 turnovers. Meanwhile, MSU-N made seven triples and shot 42 percent from the floor. The Skylights were good on the board, out-rebounding LCSC 36-27. Fuller led all scorers but the Warriors also got a key 13 points from Nahtanee Spencer.

Barta paced MSU-N with 15 points and three trey’s. Cummings and Rachelle Bennett each added 11, while Edwards scored 10 and grabbed a game-high 13 rebounds. McKeon also came off the bench to hit three triples and score 10 points while Faupel added nine.
Now Northern will have a short turnaround before facing LCSC again. The Skylights host the Warriors this Saturday night in Havre. Northern is also home to host the Montana Tech Orediggers Friday night.

“We’ll put this game behind us,” Mouat said. “We’ll learn from it and get ready to face a really good Montana Tech team and then LC again on Saturday night.”

*Skylights are 7-3 in Frontier, 17-5 overall: Next Up: VS Montana Tech Friday*

**LC State 80, Skylights 68**

**MSU-N** – Rachelle Bennett 4-12 3-4 11, Taylor Cummings 3-5 5-6 11, A’Jha Edwards 4-7 2-6 10, Natalee Faupel 3-8 3-4 9, Megan Feldman 0-2 0-0 0, Kassie Barta 4-8 4-4 15, Molly Kreycik 0-0 0-0 0, Kacie McKeon 3-8 1-2 10, Taybra Teester 0-1 1-2 1. Totals: 21-51 19-28 68.

**LCSC** – Tanis Fuller 8-11 8-10 24, McKenzie Heaslet 2-3 2-2 6, Loree Hill 2-4 0-0 5, Brittaney Niebergall 2-6 3-4 8, Caelyn Orlandi 2-10 0-0 5, Shelby Barnes 1-2 5-6 7, Hannah Byerly 1-1 0-0 2, Laurenna Plourd 2-4 0-2 4, Kelli Rice 2-3 0-0 6, Nathane Spencer 4-5 4-5 13. Totals: 26-54 22-29 80.

Halftime: LC State 45-25. 3-pointers: MSU-N 7-21 (Barta 3, McKeon 3, Cummings 1), LCSC 6-20 (Natahnee 1, Orlandi 1, Hill 1, Niebergall 1, Rice 2); Rebounds: MSU-N 36 (Edwards 13), LCSC 27 (Fuller 5); Fouls: MSU-N 22, LCSC 22; Fouled out: None.