Skylights thump Orediggers at home

MSU-N women’s thrilling comeback falls short against LC State

By George Ferguson
February 10, 2014

The Frontier Conference race is tightening as it hits the stretch run. And the Armory Gymnasium this weekend was a perfect example of just how tough things are in the league right now.

The No. 19 Montana State University-Northern Skylights got their most recent home stand off to a great start by beating the Montana Tech Orediggers 64-52 Friday night at the Armory. But in a huge rematch with the No. 13 Lewis-Clark State Warriors, things went the other way as the Skylights fell 58-49.

Still, where things stand right now, another league split won’t be damaging for MSU-N. Northern is 8-4 in league play, firmly in third place and still has two of its last four games at home.

The Skylights also looked impressive in Friday night’s win over the Orediggers.

A’Jha Edwards scored back-to-back baskets to open the game, while Kacie McKeon came off the bench to bury three 3-pointers. The first half also included an 11-2 Northern run, which saw McKeon and Kassie Barta nail back-to-back triples, while Megan Feldman added five points in the run. Northern shot a sizzling 55 percent in the first half and led Tech 38-24 at the break.

“T"hought our bench scoring was big tonight,” Northern junior Rachelle Bennett said. “Everybody on this team plays so well together, and it seems like someone different steps up every night. Tonight, Kacie and Kassie came in and made some three’s, and those shots kind of picked everybody else up.”

“T he Skylights never let up, either. On their way to a season sweep of Tech, Edwards dominated the second half, while Taybra Teeters came in and scored six straight points to help Northern up its lead to as much as 22 points at 64-42. Tech hit a few shots late, but the game was out of reach as Northern put on yet another great defensive display.

The Skylights limited the Orediggers to 37 percent shooting and a dismal 2-of-14 performance from beyond the arc. MSU-N out-rebounded Tech 34-26 and forced the Diggers into 13 turnovers.

But the Skylights were clicking offensively too, and that was good as Northern bounced back from its road loss at LC State last Saturday. MSU-N shot 50 percent from the floor and 40 percent from three, while Edwards led the way with a game-high 18 points on 7-of-8 shooting. Bennett added 10 points, McKeon scored nine, while Feldman, Teeters and Taylor Cummings each added six.
I thought we played really good defense for a full 40 minutes,” Mouat said. “But when we shoot it well, like we did tonight, it’s contagious. Tech is a very good offensive team so you have to answer with points, and our kids did that tonight. We put the ball in the hole.”

“You never want to overlook anybody in our league,” Bennett said. “Obviously we were excited to play LC (Saturday night), but we weren’t going to overlook Tech. I thought we were really ready to play tonight.”

Big lead too much again

The Skylights were indeed excited for the rematch with the Warriors Saturday night in the Armory Gymnasium. But, LC State wasted little time in squelching the enthusiasm. Northern fell behind the Warriors by 20 points in the first half of last Saturday’s loss in Lewiston, Idaho, and the same thing happened to MSU-N Saturday night.

The powerful Warriors started the game on a 7-0 run, but Rachelle Bennett stopped it with a 3-pointer. Trailing the Warriors 7-3 was pretty innocent, but what ensued wasn’t. The Skylights wouldn’t score another point for 11 straight minutes, and when Natalee Faupel finally did make a jumper from the foul line, the Warriors were ahead 19-5 with 5:42 left in the half.

From there, the Skylights would score just three more points, while Tanis Fuller and Loree Hill combined for 11 on LC’s end. The result was a discouraging 32-8 LCSC lead at halftime, as MSU-N shot an abysmal 11 percent from the field. The first half was so tough for the Skylights that they went 1-for-12 from three and 1-for-7 from the free-throw-line, areas Northern is normally very good. MSU-N also turned the ball over 12 times in the half.

“It was actually worse than the first half last week, from an offensive standpoint,” Mouat said. “They (Warriors) again got off to a good start and we didn’t. We struggled with their pressure and turnovers hurt us, but the bottom line is, we didn’t make shots. We didn’t make free throws and we missed layups. When you shoot like we did in the first half, you’re not going to beat anybody, let alone a very good team like LC.

“After what happened to LC in Great Falls (Friday night), we knew we’d get their very best,” he added. “And we just didn’t answer in the first half. It’s discouraging and frustrating, and it is for our kids too. They wanted to play well tonight. They were looking forward to this opportunity. But they’re a resilient group. They’ll respond and bounce back.”

Actually, the Skylights did respond, and did indeed bounce back. There are no moral victories in college basketball, but Northern put a major scare into the Warriors late in the second half.

Bennett hit a couple of three’s early in the second stanza, and Edwards, who picked up three fouls in the first half and a fourth early in the second, got going in the paint. Northern’s offense showed signs of life, but the Warriors had full control of the game, and still led 44-22 with 13:46 to play.

But MSU-N wouldn’t go quietly into the cold Havre night. Taylor Cummings nailed a much-needed triple, and Megan Feldman had a great little scoring run of her own to help trim the lead just a little more. LCSC’s Caelyn Orlandi answered with back-to-back buckets, but MSU-N had started to clamp down on defense, and momentum seemed to be changing.

However, with just 3:57 left, the Skylights were still down by 14 points, and any chance of a comeback seemed improbable. From that point though, things really started to click. Bennett hit another three, and Cummings scored off a steal just seconds later, and the lead was down to 56-45. Bennett then made two free throws and Edwards capped a 9-0 spurt with a putback bucket. Now the lead was 56-49 with 1:22 left, and the Skylights had the ball back. Northern got a good look at a 3-pointer on that possession, which would have cut the lead all the way down to four points, but it rimmed off, and LCSC was finally able to put the MSU-N rally to bed with some late free throws.

Though the comeback attempt fell short, for the second straight week, Northern played valiantly from way behind against the Warriors (10-2, 23-3). Northern shot 38 percent in the second half, made four threes and got even with LCSC on the boards at 34-34. The Skylights also stopped turning it over and played much better defense.
Edwards finished with a double-double, scoring 15 points and grabbing 15 rebounds. Bennett hit four treys and scored 15 as well, while Feldman added eight points and five boards and Cummings chipped in with seven while playing great defense on LCSC point guard Brittaney Niebergall. Fuller paced the Warriors with 14 points.

And while the comeback attempt fell short, and the Skylights were extremely disappointed with their second loss to the Warriors in seven days, they showed tremendous heart and character in not letting the game become a meaningless blowout.

“They (Warriors) were going to do what they do in the second half,” Mouat said. “They were going to continue to pressure us and take shots. We knew we had to make a stand to not let the game just completely get out of hand. And we did that. We made more shots, we finished around the rim, we made free throws and we took better care of the ball. We did everything we didn’t do in the first half.

“So I am very proud of this team for making that stand,” Mouat added. “They fought very hard, they showed a lot of heart, and they gave themselves a real chance down the stretch. I’m very proud of them for that.”

The Skylights (18-6) will now go out on the road for two more critical Frontier games. Northern is at fourth-place UM-Western Thursday night, and at first-place Westminster Saturday night.

**Skylights are 8-4 in Frontier, 18-6 overall: Next Up: at UM-Western Thursday**

**Skylights 64, Montana Tech 52**

**MT** – Kabri Emerson 1-4 5-6 8, Kelsey DeWit 3-6 0-0 6, Hattie Thatcher 0-5 0-0 0, Shayla Mack 0-3 1-2 1, Mandy Machinal 8-12 2-2 18, Rachel Farris 1-1 2-2 4, Martha Dembek 3-7 0-1 6, Sophie Baetz 3-9 2-4 9, Kimi Heng 0-1 0-0 0, Callee Remsen 0-3 0-0 0.

Totals: 19-52 12-18 52.

**MSU-N** – Megan Feldman 2-4 2-4 6, A’Jha Edwards 7-8 4-5 18, Natalee Faupel 0-4 2-2 2, Rachelle Bennett 2-6 6-6 10, Taylor Cummings 2-6 2-2 6, Kassie Barta 2-2 0-0 5, Kacie McKeon 3-6 0-0 9, Taryn Norby 0-0 0-0 0, Molly Kreycik 1-3 0-0 2, Jordan Powers 0-0 0-0 0, Taybra Teeters 3-5 0-0 6.

Totals: 22-44 16-19 64.

Halftime: Northern 38-24. 3-pointers MSU-N 4-10 (McKeon 3, Barta 1), MT 2-14 (Emerson 1, Baetz 1); Rebounds: MSU-N 34 (Edwards 15), MT 26 (Four with three each); Fouls: MSU-N 18, MT 18; Fouled out: None.

**LC State 58, Skylights 49**

**LCSC** – Caelyn Orlandi 3-8 5-6 12, Brittaney Niebergall 3-7 1-3 7, Loree Hill 4-5 2-2 13, Tanis Fuller 7-12 0-0 14, Mckenzie Heaslet 2-5 1-2 5, Megan Risinger 1-2 3-3 5, Hannah Byerly 0-2 0-0 0, Brooke Litalien 1-2 0-0 2, Kelli Rice 0-0 0-0 0, Laurenna Plourd 0-1 0-0 0. Totals: 21-44 12-16 58.

**MSU-N** – A’Jha Edwards 7-15 1-6 15, Kassie Barta 0-8 2-2 2, Natalee Faupel 1-7 0-0 2, Rachelle Bennett 4-7 3-4 15, Taylor Cummings 3-8 0-1 7, Kacie McKeon 0-7 0-0 0, Megan Feldman 2-3 4-5 8, Molly Kreycik 0-0 0-0 0, Taybra Teeters 0-0 0-0 0. Totals: 17-55 10-18 49.

Halftime: LC State 32-8. 3-pointers: MSU-N 5-22 (Bennett 4, Cummings 1), LCSC 4-8 (Orlandi 1, Hill 3); Rebounds: MSU-N 34 (Edwards 15), LCSC 34 (Byerly 7); Fouls: MSU-N 15, LCSC 21; Fouled out: None.