Skylights get on track by clobbering DSU
By George Ferguson
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A three-game losing streak with two losses coming at the hands of the top two Frontier Conference powers didn’t exactly have the Montana State University-Northern Skylights in panic mode.

However, they were extremely focused on stopping that streak against the dangerous Dickinson State Blue Hawks Thursday night in the Armory Gymnasium. And the No. 22 Skylights didn’t just stop the skid, they put the brakes on it in a big way, blowing out the Blue Hawks 65-42 Thursday night in the Armory.

The win pushed MSU-N to 9-6 in the Frontier and secured a home game for the upcoming league playoffs ahead of tonight’s regular season finale against Rocky Mountain College. But perhaps just as important as all that, MSU-N got back to playing good basketball for a full 40 minutes.

“We needed this,” senior Kassie Barta, who will be honored before tonight’s game said. “We had been slumping. But we were due to play well. We know we’re too good to play like we’ve been the last few games.”

In the three of Northern’s last four losses, which have come over the course of the last three weeks, MSU-N has gotten off to really bad starts. But that wasn’t the case Thursday night. Freshman Natalee Faupel hit a 3-pointer in the first two minutes of the game, and while it took a couple more minutes to shake the Blue Hawks, the Skylights were off to the races.

Megan Feldman and A’Jha Edwards scored a combined eight points on what was a 10-0 run to push Northern’s lead to 18-9 with 12 minutes left in the first half. Then, Taylor Cummings and Faupel hit back-to-back threes to stretch the lead further. And finally, Northern finished off the first stanza with back-to-back bombs by Faupel and Barta, as well as a last-second layup by Faupel, the former Butte High standout who wound up leading the Skylights with 18 points and four 3-pointers.

Northern was equally as good in the second half, as the Skylights wound up shooting a scorching 58 percent from the field, making nine threes and dominating the Blue Hawks on the boards, 43-27. Defensively, MSU-N also forced DSU into 21 turnovers and held leading scorer TaRicka Linzy to just three points. DSU didn’t have a double-digit scorer, while Northern held a Frontier Conference opponent under 50 points for the ninth time this season.

“They (Blue Hawks) came in here hot,” MSU-N head coach Chris Mouat said. “They were coming off a big win over Carroll and had our full respect. I thought we really needed to defend the 3-point-line and win on the boards tonight and we did both those things. And I think doing that set the tone for us.”

The start also set the tone for what was an efficient night for the Skylights. Edwards scored 13 points and grabbed nine boards, while Feldman added nine and Barta and Kacie McKeon each knocked down two treys.
to combine for 12 points off the bench. Taybra Teeters gave MSU-N a spark as well, scoring six points on three buckets in the second half.

“It was really nice not to have to fight back,” Barta said. “We’ve won a lot of second-half battles lately, but tonight we won a first-half battle for a change and that was what we needed.”

“Our mindset coming in was just to make shots and play defense,” added Edwards. “We’ve had some tough losses on the road lately, so this one feels good. It feels good to be back at home and play well in our gym.”

And the Skylights (19-8) have one more chance to play well in their gym as they welcome in Rocky tonight. Northern can cinch up third place in the Frontier with a victory, but may have that happen regardless with another UM-Western loss Saturday night at Lewis-Clark State. And MSU-N can accomplish those things thanks to a dominating performance against the Blue Hawks Thursday night.

“We played well,” Mouat said. “We went on a nice run at the end of the first half. We were balanced. Our bench came in and gave us a great loft. A lot of different kids got into the act and it was nice to see the ball going in the hole. Hopefully, we can keep it going against a dangerous Rocky team.”

Tonight’s home MSU-N home finale against RMC will tip at 6 inside the Armory Gymnasium. In their last year of Frontier Conference play, the Blue Hawks were beaten by the Skylights by a combined 61 points.

**Skylights are 9-6 in the Frontier, 19-8 overall; Next Up: Vs RMC tonight**

**Skylights 65, Dickinson State 42**

**DSU** – Jalyn Klauser 2-6 0-0 4, Dawne Degel 2-6 0-0 4, Mariah Duran 0-2 1-2 1, TaRicka Linzey 1-5 0-0 3, Jess Bygate 3-9 3-4 9, Jalisa Gatlin 2-10 2-2 6, Kreshawnee Alley 3-7 2-3 8, Racheal McDonough 1-4 0-0 2, Hannh Beede 2-3 0-0 5. Totals: 16-52 8-15 42.

**MSU-N** – Megan Feldman 2-4 5-6 9, A’Jha Edwards 5-10 3-6 13, Natalee Faupel 5-8 4-4 18, Rachelle Bennett 0-3 1-2 1, Taylor Cummings 1-3 2-2 5, Kassie Barta 2-8 0-0 6, Kacie McKeon 2-6 0-1 6, Taryn Norby 0-0 0-0 0, Molly Kreycik 0-3 1-2 1, Jordan Powers 0-0 0-0 0, Taybra Teeters 3-6 0-0 6. Totals: 20-51 16-24 65.

Halftime: Northern 37-17. 3-pointers: DSU 2-15 (Linzy 1, Beede 1), MSU-N 9-22 (Faupel 4, Barta 2, McKeon 2); Rebounds: DSU 27 (Linzy 6), MSU-N 43 (Edwards 9, Teeters 7); Fouls: DSU 18, MSU-N 13. Fouled out: None.