Skylights roll past Battlin' Bears in finale
MSU-Northern women crush Rocky Mountain College to lock up a third-place Frontier finish
By George Ferguson
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After a tough stretch of road games, the Montana State University-Northern women’s basketball team had plenty to play for on the final weekend of the regular season. And the Skylights were playing their high-stakes games in front of their home faithful.

And Northern took advantage of the home-court hospitality, as No. 22 MSU-N followed up Thursday night’s blowout win over Dickinson State with a 74-50 throttling of Rocky Mountain College Friday night in Havre. The win gave Northern a 10-6 Frontier Conference record and an outstanding third-place finish. The sweep on the final weekend of the regular season also ensured MSU-N of a home game in the Frontier playoffs, as well as a chance at an at-large berth in the NAIA national tournament.

“I’m very proud of this team,” Northern head coach Chris Mouat said. “This is a tough league with great teams and talented players. So to finish where we did, I’m extremely happy. “And I thought we played very well again tonight,” he continued. “We knew Rocky would come in here and play us tough tonight. They are very hungry for a win right now and they gave a great effort. But I thought we defended really well, we took good care of the ball tonight, we shared it well and we won the battle of the boards by a significant margin. Those things add up to a pretty complete performance.”

And just like in Thursday night’s win against DSU, the Skylights got off to a great start against the Bears, who finished 0-16 in conference play. Megan Feldman and A’Jha Edwards combined for an early eight points, and later, Natalee Faupel would score six straight to give the Skylights a 21-13 lead with 6:23 left in the half. But the finish to the half is what separated Northern from the struggling Bears.

Kassie Barta, playing in her senior night game, scored on two fast-break layups, while Edwards dominated for three straight buckets in what would become an 11-0 run in the final three minutes of the half. And thanks to the spurt, Northern took a commanding 35-20 lead over the Bears into intermission.

“IT’s been an emphasis of ours to get off to better starts and to play better offensively,” junior Taylor Cummings said. “We’ve been in a slump offensively, but these last two games, we’ve played much better. We just came out and executed and made shots in the first half.”

The Skylights made shots in the second half, too. They shot 50 percent in the second half and hit all five of their 3-pointers in the second 20 minutes, including two by Barta, who finished with 13 points in her last regular season home game. MSU-N pushed its lead to as many as 30 points in the second half, and were dominant from start to finish.

Edwards paced the Skylights offensively with 17 points to go with nine rebounds. Feldman came up big as well, scoring 14 points and grabbing a game-high 11 boards. Feldman was key on both ends, including getting two steals and running the floor for breakout layups. Faupel added nine points as Northern shot 42
percent for the game and out-rebounded Rocky a whopping 47-28. The vaunted MSU-N defense also forced the Bears into 16 turnovers, while the Skylights committed just six.

“We made shots in the second half,” Mouat said. “I thought we tightened up our execution and started getting them to go down. And once a few went down, we got rolling. We shot it well last night against Dickinson, and we did again tonight. It’s nice to see the ball go in the hole that often, and again, we were balanced and the scoring came from a lot of different kids.

“It was just a good weekend,” he continued. “And I’m proud of the kids for coming home and going out and getting two wins and playing well in the process.”

And the process isn’t over as Northern reached the coveted 20-win plateau Friday night, giving the Skylights a great chance to go to the national tournament for the first time since 2005. But first, they are just proud of their finish in such a tough league, and are looking forward to building more momentum in the upcoming Frontier playoffs.

“I’m super proud of how we finished this season,” Cummings said. “We were picked to finish sixth and we ended up third, with two really strong teams ahead of us. So we proved a lot of people wrong. Now we just have to keep this going.”

Northern will take on Carroll College in the first round of the playoffs Saturday night at 7 p.m. in the Armory Gymnasium.

**Skylights are 10-6 in the Frontier, 20-8 overall; Next Up: Vs Carroll Saturday**

**Skylights 74, Rocky Mountain 50**

**RMC** – Brittany Myers 1-8 2-3 4, Megan Halstead 4-9 0-0 8, Kelsey George 3-6 3-4 11, Brittany Kumm 5-13 2-3 13, Allie Savageau 1-3 2-3 4, Kayla Lucas 1-1 2-2 5, Taylor Kufeld 2-4 0-0 5. Totals: 17-48 11-15 50.

**MSU-N** – Megan Feldman 6-9 2-4 14, A’Jha Edwards 7-15 3-5 17, Kassie Barta 4-11 3-3 13, Rachelle Bennett 2-5 1-2 5, Taylor Cummings 1-5 2-2 4, Kacie McKeon 1-7 0-0 3, Natalee Faupel 3-7 2-3 9, Taryn Norby 0-0 0-0 0, Molly Kreyck 1-3 1-2 4, Jordan Powers 1-1 0-0 2, Taybra Teeters 1-2 1-1 3. Totals: 27-65 15-22 74.

Halftime: Northern 35-20. 3-pointers: RMC 5-12 (George 2, Kumm 1, Lucas 1, Kafeld 1), MSU-N 5-20 (Barta 2, McKeon 1, Faupel 1, Kreyck 1); Rebounds: RMC 28 (Halstead 5), MSU-N 47 (Feldman 11); Fouls: RMC 16, MSU-N 15; Fouled out: None.