Skylights home for rubber match with Saints
Frontier Women’s Playoffs
By George Ferguson
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The Montana State University-Northern Skylights and Carroll College Fighting Saints are no strangers to postseason play. And it’s getting where it seems like the Skylights and Saints run into each other in the Frontier Conference playoffs every season.

A year ago, Carroll beat Northern in the Frontier semifinals in Helena. But Saturday night, MSU-N gets a shot to return the favor as the No. 21 Skylights (20-8) host the Saints (14-13) in a Frontier quarterfinal game. Tip-off is slated for 7 p.m. inside the Armory Gymnasium.

Tonight’s game will be a rubber match, too. Northern beat Carroll 52-42 back in November in Havre, but the Skylights fell to the Saints 66-60 last month in Helena. And while Carroll struggled to a 7-9 Frontier record, and a tie for fifth in the final conference standings, the Saints will bring a tough and tested team into tonight’s showdown.

“Carroll is very good,” MSU-N head coach Chris Mouat said. “They have very good players. They always have a good plan and are very well-prepared. They went through a tough stretch this season where they lost a lot of close games. But I believe, on any given night, Carroll can beat anybody in our league.”

The Skylights have proven they can be that good too, and a Northern team with only one senior is on the verge of a historic season. MSU-N is the No. 3 seed in the playoffs and has already won 20 games, but the Skylights are also in position, should they not win the Frontier championship, to make the NAIA national tournament for the first time since 2005, Mouat’s first year at the helm. Northern is currently well inside the NAIA Top 25, and with only one poll left, the Skylights have put themselves in a great spot to earn at least an at-large berth to the NAIA national tournament in three weeks.

But first things first. Northern’s only priority is beating Carroll Saturday, and reaching its third straight Frontier semifinal. To do that, the Skylights will need to bring their trademark defense, a defense which allows just 52 points per game, which is second-best in all of NAIA basketball. But playing great defense is expected, because MSU-N has done it all year. What the Skylights also need tonight is great offense against a very good Carroll defense.

Northern will certainly ride the shoulders of 6-5 center A’Jha Edwards, who averages 13 points and 11 rebounds per game and is a matchup nightmare for the Saints, and anyone else. But the Skylights would also like to see a good shooting trend continue, and have a balanced attack from the likes of Rachelle Bennett, Taylor Cummings, Kassie Barta and Kacie McKeon, all of whom are dangerous when they’re knocking down shots. The continued production from 6-0 forward Megan Feldman will also be welcomed. Feldman is coming off a strong games against Dickinson State and Rocky Mountain College last weekend.
“Carroll did a lot of things to disrupt us offensively in Helena,” Mouat said. “We need to handle what they do better this time around. But, yes, it comes down to execution and making shots. We went through a stretch where we were really in a slump offensively, but last weekend was much better and hopefully it continues. Against a very good Carroll defense, we need to generate good shots and make them.”

On the other end, Northern will look to stymie Carroll’s up-and-down offense like it did in Havre back in November. But that’s easier said than done. Guards Bailey Snelling and Kalee Junkermier are outstanding 3-point shooters and average a combined 22 points per game. Backcourt mates Jordan Pfau and Katie Estey are solid as well, while senior Jordan Bagley Jordan Johnston give the Saints a strong inside presence and make them a good rebounding team.

“Snelling and Junkermeier are two of the best guards in our league,” Mouat said. “And Carroll is also very athletic and they play hard on both ends. They are a great offensive rebounding team, and when they get rolling shooting the ball, they are tough to stop. So we’re going to face challenges against them on both ends.”

Carroll will be a big challenge indeed, but the Skylights do have the home-court advantage and momentum after two lopsided wins in Havre last weekend. Not to mention, Northern is hungry to advance and even hungrier to make a statement, which is to punch its ticket to the national tournament, something that would be helped by a win over rival Carroll Saturday night.

“The kids are excited for this game,” Mouat said. “It’s at home, on our floor, in front of our fans and I think that gives our kids a lot of confidence. It’s going to be a tough game, a big challenge for us. Carroll is very good and we’re going to have to play extremely well. But the kids are very excited and will be prepared.”

Saturday night’s Frontier quarterfinal between the Skylights and Saints tips off at 7 p.m. at the Armory Gymnasium. If MSU-N wins, it will travel to No. 2-seed Lewis-Clark State for the semifinals next Friday. If Carroll prevails, the Saints will trip to No. 1 Westminster next Friday. Saturday’s second quarterfinal matchup has No. 4 seed UM-Western hosting No. 5 seed Great Falls in Dillon.

**Frontier Women’s Playoffs No. 21 Skylights (20-8) vs Carroll College (14-13) Saturday 7 p.m. in the Armory Gymnasium**

**Radio:** 92.5 KPQX FM  
**Streaming:** www.msun.edu/athletics  
**Twitter:** Twitter/Havredaily

**MSU-N Probable Starters**

G Taylor Cummings, 5-5, Jr. 9 ppg  
G Rachelle Bennett, 5-7, Jr. 9 ppg  
G Natalee Faupel, 5-10, Fr. 9 ppg  
F Megan Feldman, 6-0, Jr. 6 rpg  
C A’Jha Edwards, 6-5, Jr.13 ppg