Skylights, Lights play four in the Armory
MSU-Northern hosts Northwest Indian College in a hoops doubleheader tonight
By George Ferguson
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The Montana State University-Northern Skylights already have a long road trip in the books. And the Skylights have many more long trips in the foreseeable future. But for one weekend, Northern is ready to enjoy the comforts of home.

Tonight, the Skylights (2-0) will make their home debut when they host the Northwest Indian College Eagles at 6 inside the Armory Gymnasium. The Skylights will play a second home game Sunday when they take on Warner-Pacific at 5 p.m.

Northern enters its first two home games fresh off two dominating wins in Edmonton, Alberta, last weekend. And though both the Eagles and Knights should present the Skylights, led by seniors A’Jha Edwards and Taylor Cummings, as well as sensational sophomore Natalee Faupel, with much more stern tests than Concordia-Alberta and the King’s University did last week, MSU-N will be heavily favored in both games. Starting with tonight’s contest against the Eagles.

“We really don’t have a lot on them (Eagles) at this point,” Northern head coach Chris Mouat said. “We did see them last year and are familiar with some of their kids and their style of play. They had a couple of kids who could really score if you left them last year, and I know coach Lane has done a good job recruiting. I know we’ll have to defend the 3-point line and limit them to one shot, and that we’ll have to be prepared for whatever they throw at us defensively.”

Defense is where the Skylights will hang their hat, this weekend, and all season long. Northern led the country in scoring defense last year, and already, the Skylights have only allowed 39 and 17 points, respectively.

However, Northern is also looking like a team capable of being very potent on offense. Edwards, Cummings and Faupel, the reigning Frontier Player of the Week, are all double-figure scorers, but Northern’s depth is already showing, too. Megan Feldman and Taybra Teeters are off to a strong start this season, while true freshmen Jacy Thompson, Makhayla Farmer and Brandy Lambourne all chipped in with scoring in last weekend’s trip to Edmonton.

That trip however, won’t be like this weekend, especially Sunday’s game with Warner-Pacific. The Knights are a Cascade Conference stalwart and they will present the Skylights with their first NAIA test of the season.

“They (Knights) are a very well-coached team,” Mouat said. “We saw them in Great Falls a few years back, and I came away very impressed with what they were running and how well they executed. They have a ton of new players, and Saturday in Great Falls is their opener, so we’ll have to do what we can to get a look at them before Sunday. I know they’ll come in ready to go.
“This is a big weekend for us because we are at home,” he continued. “We had a productive trip last weekend, and all of our players got into the mix. We simply need to move forward as we step up in competition. I know that both teams coming in will be quality opponents and that we’ll have to improve on our performance from last weekend to be successful.”

Tonight’s game between the Skylights and Northwest Indian College tips off at 6. The Skylights and Knights will face off Sunday at 5 p.m.

**Lights face two tough tests**

The Montana State University-Northern men’s basketball team got the 2014-15 season off to an early start. And it was a good start, too, as the Lights trounced Concordia-Alberta last Thursday night in the Armory Gymnasium.

Still early, the Lights will face a much more difficult challenge in each of their next two home games. Northern (1-0) returns to the Armory tonight to face Northwest Indian College at 8. The Lights will also host the University of Lethbridge Friday afternoon.

“We know these games are going to be a big challenge for us,” Northern head coach Shawn Huse said. “Especially this early in the season.”

Tonight’s game pits the Lights, who blasted Concordia 10-3-56 last week, in a rematch with Northwest Indian College. The Eagles came to Havre last January and nearly upset the Lights. They had the lead for much of the game, but Northern prevailed 69-68. The Eagles are off to a 2-0 start this season, and Huse expects another tough outing.

“Northwest Indian College returns a point guard who is as good as any player we faced at the one-spot all last year,” he said. “Although they do have some changeover at some other positions, they traditionally play very hard and play together very well. We know this is going to be a huge test this early in the season, especially after the game they played here in early January when they had the lead most of the night, then fell short to us by just one point.”

And things will get even more difficult on what will be a shot turnaround for the Lights. On Friday, MSU-N will take the floor for an afternoon matinee against the Lethbridge Pronghorns. Lethbridge is typically a top team in the Canadian CIS, which is Canada’s version of NCAA Division I. Over the years, the Pronghorns have given the Lights plenty of good battles, and last season, they knocked off several Frontier Conference powers, including UM-Western. Lethbridge will test the Lights on the inside with 6-10 center Brent Watkins and 6-6 swingman Brandon Bine leading the way.

“The Pronghorns return many key pieces,” Huse said. Brandon (Bine) had 31 (points) the other night in a preseason win. They brought in some extremely talented, tall, athletic, skilled guys to pick up from where they left off last season. This is a group that beat three good teams in our league, including our conference champions (Western, Rocky (exhibition), and UGF). Say no more. We know our offensive and defensive execution is going need to be very sharp if we are going have success. They have played several games already this year, so we have to be really well prepared to play against them Friday.”

The Lights should be. They were sharp in their first game of the season, with five players scoring in double figures against Concordia, including a career-high 17 from
junior Damien Robinson. But Huse knows Northern’s next two home games will be a level up in competition, and though it’s early, the Lights are in for a pair of battles.

Tonight’s game between Northern and Northwest Indian College tips off at 8 at the Armory Gymnasium. Friday’s tilt with the University of Lethbridge will start at 3 p.m.

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