Skylights split with NAIA foes in Florida

By George Ferguson
January 5, 2015

March. That was the last time anyone on the Montana State University-Northern women’s basketball roster tasted defeat. But after a 14-0 start to the 2014-15 season, the Skylights finally ran into the taste of defeat, just before the year ended.

Last Tuesday afternoon in West Palm Beach, Florida, the No. 17 Skylights saw their 14-game winning streak come to an end as they lost an overtime heartbreaker to NAIA DII power Northwestern College, 63-58. But MSU-N didn’t let the taste of defeat settle in. The following day, the Skylights bounced back with a resounding 79-59 win over tournament host Northwood University. The victory closed out non-conference play, as the Skylights finished with a sparkling 15-1 heading into the Frontier Conference season.

“I think we learned a lot of lessons in those two games, lessons that we can carry over into conference play,” said MSU-N head coach Chris Mouat. “We played two really good teams. Two traditional powers at their level. It was two great games. And those games will prepare us well for what we’re about to face.”

Northern indeed learned some valuable lessons in the stunning loss to Northwestern. And what was stunning was, the Skylights were ahead by 18 points with five minutes to play, and still up 11 with just under two minutes to go. Also stunning was that MSU-N was just 10-of-24 from the free throw-line, while also committing 21 turnovers in the final 20 minutes. It was those factors, plus the inspired play of the Red Raiders, which led to a disappointing collapse. Once in overtime, the Red Raiders outscored the Skylights 8-3.

“We played really well on the defensive end,” Mouat said. “We did everything we wanted to do in the first half. We were really prepared defensively, we held them down offensively and they’re a high-scoring team. We were up six at halftime and increased it to 12 right away. But for the rest of the second half we were our own worst enemy.

“The free-throw-line and turnovers were areas we just weren’t ourselves,” he added. “Credit to Northwestern because they came out and took it to us in the second half. But anytime you shoot that percentage from the free-throw-line and turn the ball over 21 times in a half, against anybody, you’re probably going to lose. It’s disappointing because we had the thing pretty well in hand, and usually, we’re pretty good at finishing games. But we just didn’t do that against Northwestern. We allowed them a little bit of hope, and they turned that into a lot of belief that they could come back and beat us, and that’s what ended up happening. So it was really disheartening to lose our first game that way.”

Foul trouble was another major factor in the loss to the Red Raiders. Seniors A’Jha Edwards and Taylor Cummings both fouled out, as did fellow senior Megan Feldman and sophomore Molly Kreycik. Edwards and Feldman both had double-doubles for the Skylights. Edwards finished with 12 points and 15 rebounds, while Feldman had 11 points and 10 boards. Cummings scored 10 for Northern, while freshman Jacy Thompson led the way with 15.

And while the loss to Northwestern was indeed a shocker, MSU-N showed its resolve the next day by returning to the court to run away from Northwood. The Skylights easily shrugged off the loss the day before, and rode a record-breaking game from Edwards, who scored 24 points and grabbed an MSU-N single-game record 25 rebounds. Edwards finished her spectacular game with a 10-of-17 performance from the floor. The rebounding record had stood for more than three decades. Barb VanDermars 22 boards was set in a game back in 1982.

“The biggest thing in that second game was, we dominated on the boards, and played extremely well defensively,” Mouat said. “A’Jha was tremendous, setting the all-time record with 25. So the boards and our
defense were the biggest factors. They’re a really fast, high-scoring team, and we limited them to one shot pretty much the entire game.”

Northern also got a balanced attack on the offensive end. Faupel poured in 18 points, while Feldman added 13. Off the bench, Brandy Lambourne, Makhayla Farmer, Taybra Teeters and Cydney Auzenne combined for another 15 points.

“We got a lot of contributions from all of our kids,” Mouat said. “Brandy Lambourne and Makhayla Farmer gave us a big lift, when we increased our lead just before half. Those kids during that stretch really stood out because they made some big baskets for us. Molly Kreycik had a really solid week as well. We got a great lift from a bunch of different kids, in both games, but especially in that second game.

“Northwood is a really explosive team, they just beat Xavier, who is No. 18 at our level,” Mouat continued. “So we knew we would be in for a tough game. But we played really well, we had the lead up to 26 at one point. So it was a great way for our kids to bounce back from the game against Northwestern. I was really pleased with our effort. It was a great way for our kids to go forward into the conference season.”

And conference season is now upon the Skylights. After their two games in Florida, Northern will finally be back inside the Armory Gymnasium this weekend. The Skylights begin Frontier play Friday night against Montana Tech, then host nationally ranked Lewis-Clark State Saturday night.

Note: For a full women's preview of the 2015 Frontier Conference, see Wednesday's Havre Daily News.

**Northwestern 63, Skylights 58 OT**

**MSU-N** – Jacy Thompson 5-11 4-5 15, Natalee Faupel 2-10 0-3 4, Taylor Cummings 4-10 1-2 10, Megan Feldman 4-8 3-4 11, A’Jha Edwards 6-11 0-3 12, Brandy Lambourne 0-0 1-2 1, Taryn Norby 0-0 0-1 0, Molly Kreycik 2-4 0-0 4, Cydney Auzenne 0-2 1-4 1, Taybra Teeters 0-3 0-0 0. Totals: 23-59 10-24.

Halftime: Northern 29-23. 3-pointers: 2-13 (Thompson 1, Cummings 1); Rebounds: 49 (Edwards 15, Feldman 10); Fouls: 29; Fouled out: Edwards, Cummings, Kreycik, Feldman.

**Skylights 79, Northwood 59**

**MSU-N** – Jacy Thompson 2-6 0-0 4, Natalee Faupel 7-12 2-3 18, Taylor Cummings 2-6 0-0 5, Megan Feldman 6-7 1-2 13, A’Jha Edwards 10-17 4-6 24, Brandy Lambourne 2-3 1-2 5, Taryn Norby 0-1 0-0 0, Molly Kreycik 0-2 0-0 0, Makhayla Farmer 1-2 1-2 3, Cydney Auzenne 1-1 0-0 3, Taybra Teeters 2-2 0-0 2. Totals: 33-59 9-15.

Halftime: Northern 37-23. 3-pointers: 4-12 (Faupel 2, Cummings 1, Auzenne 1); Rebounds: 41 (Edwards 25); Fouls: 12; Fouled out: None.

[Havre Daily News website](http://www.havretdnews.com/)