It’s becoming cliché, but there’s no denying the Montana State University-Northern Skylights are having a dream season. And while there’s a lot of season left, the Skylights took a big step forward again Saturday night.

In Billings, the Skylights ran away from Rocky Mountain College, 67-53. The win took the No. 11 Skylights to a perfect 4-0 start to Frontier Conference play, while improving them to a stellar 19-1 overall.

And while the final score was a bit lopsided, the Battlin’ Bears made things anything but easy on the Skylights, who are all alone in first place in the Frontier after two weeks.

“We had to battle,” MSU-N head coach Chris Mouat said. “Rocky came in with a great plan, and they defended us really well I thought. And they hit some big shots on us. Whitney Mitchell is a great, great player for them, and she hit a lot of big baskets. So it was definitely a battle.

“But I thought we did a great job of staying patient, and we were able to open up a double-digit lead at halftime,” he continued. “And we never really let it go. I thought our execution was really good on both ends of the floor, and that was nice considering how well Rocky played. So I’m really proud of our kids tonight. It was just another big conference win for us.”

Early on, the Skylights were getting paced by the Bears, who went 0-16 in the Frontier a year ago, but are much-improved this season. However, behind some big baskets by A’Jha Edwards, Natalee Faupel and Taybra Teeters, the Skylights went on an 8-0 run toward the end of the first half, and eventually, they led 30-19.

From there, Northern was efficient. The Skylights shot a blistering 61 percent from the floor in the second half, while making seven 3-pointers in the contest. Northern’s defense was again stout, as the Skylights held the Bears to just 37 percent shooting, and they out-rebounded RMC 38-30.

The play of Teeters, who poured in a season-high 14 points, was also big. She came off the bench to go 7-for-8 from the field, and gave the Skylights even more firepower.

”Taybra was the difference tonight,” Mouat said. “When she’s shooting it like that, it takes so much pressure off A’Jha and Bird (Megan Feldman) and it just gives us another added dimension in the post. She played great tonight, and I’m really, really proud of her.”

Overall, Northern was balanced. Freshman Jacy Thompson dropped five triples on the Bears on her way to 18 points. Faupel added 11, while Edwards had her 13th double-double of the season with 10 points and 12 boards. Taylor Cummings added eight points and a season-high nine assists. Rocky was smothered by Northern’s defense for much of the night, but Mitchell did manage 20 in a losing effort.

“It was another great team effort,” Mouat said. “I thought we played really well, together on both ends of the floor, and that’s what it takes to be successful in this league.”

And the Skylights are successful thus far. A road sweep is always big in the Frontier, but one that includes a win at nationally ranked Carroll makes the sweep even more important. And with one big weekend down, Northern will gear up for another one. Northern returns home to host UM-Western Friday night, then will have its monster showdown with Westminster College Saturday night in the Armory Gymnasium.
“Every weekend is big, every weekend is tough,” Mouat said. “This trip was tough. Next weekend is going to be rough. But right now I’m just really proud of this team. They continue to find ways to play well, and to win games. I’m just really proud of them, and they should be excited about where we’re at right now.”

Lights stumble in Billings

Something had to give when the Montana State University-Northern Lights and Rocky Mountain College Battlin’ Bears tipped off Saturday night in Billings. The Bears, picked finish second in the Frontier Conference, and the Lights, picked to finish third, came into Saturday night’s game at the Fortin Center both searching for their first league win.

And in the end, it was the Lights who gave, as they couldn’t catch the Bears in a 66-56 RMC victory. The loss dropped to Northern to 0-4 in league play, and it’s the Lights’ first four-game losing streak in years.

During that skid, the Lights have struggled to find ways to pull away from teams. Northern has battled and play well at times, but down the stretch, the Lights have struggled to overtake their Frontier rivals.

And it was no different Saturday night.

After Rocky staked itself to a 32-25 halftime lead, the Lights found themselves playing well, and were in a battle midway through the second half. When freshman Dylan Tatarka nailed a 3-pointer, the Lights were only down 49-45 with plenty of time left. But from there, MSU-N couldn’t get the stops it needed on defense, or the shots to fall when it needed them most. Rocky scored six unanswered points after Tatarka’s three, and the Lights never got any closer than six points the rest of the way.

Shooting, in particular clutch shooting, continued to hamper Northern. The Lights shot 39 percent from the field against the Bears, but struggled from beyond the 3-point-line. MSU-N made just six three’s and shot 25 percent from long range.

Conversely, the Bears were efficient, despite a strong defensive effort from the Lights. Rocky shot 50 percent from the floor, while out-rebounding the Lights by 12. The Bears also got a big lift from Malachi Roberts, who scored a game-high 23 points on 10-of-15 shooting. He also made three of the Bears’ six triples. While Northern did hold RMC star guard Tyree Anderson to just eight points, Taylor Longo added 13 points and Rob Nygy made some big shots late, while also grabbing 10 rebounds.

Warren Edmonson sank three treys for the Lights and scored 15 points. Trevail Lee added 10 points and KJ Rech and Corbin Pearson chipped in with eight apiece.

It was a tough road trip for the Lights, who also lost to Carroll in overtime Thursday night. Now, Northern (11-9) is in a big hole in the Frontier standings, and with a quarter of the season already gone, the Lights will have to start making up ground in a hurry.

But that won’t be an easy task. MSU-N returns home to host nationally ranked UM-Western Friday night, as well as arch rival Westminster Saturday. Still, MSU-N head coach Shawn Huse insists there will be no quite in his Lights.

“I refuse to believe this is our destiny and just tuck our tails,” Huse said. “We have always found a way and I feel no differently now. As long as our guys learn from this, good things will happen. Our program has always been about not settling, I am not happy about these last two tough games and we are going to get over this hump. We will work hard and fight to find a way. That's always been the only response to have when times are tough, and this is no different.”

Both the Northern men and women will host UM-Western Friday night, starting at 6 p.m. inside the Armory Gymnasium. Westminster will visit the Lights and Skylights on Saturday night.

**Skylights 67, Rocky Mountain 53**

**MSU-N** – Megan Feldman 1-4 2-3 4, A’Jha Edwards 5-8 0-0 10, Jacy Thompson 6-12 1-1 18, Natalee Faupel 5-11 0-0 11, Taylor Cummings 3-8 1-1 8, Brandy Lambourne 0-2 0-0 0, Molly Kreycik 1-6 0-0 2, Taybra Teeters 7-8 0-0 14. Totals: 28-59 4-5 67.
RMC – Bridger Rice 3-7 0-0 7, Mya Perrow-Donovan 0-2 0-0 0, Tenika Capouch 2-4 3-4 7, Whitney Mitchell 7-15 6-7 20, Jayde LeFevre 4-12 3-4 14, Katie Fitzpatrick 0-2 1-2 1, Marissa Morais 1-3 2-4 4. Totals: 17-46 15-21 53.

Halftime: Northern 30-19. 3-pointers: MSU-N 7-22 (Thompson 5, Faupel 1, Cummings 1); RMC 4-9 (Rice 1, LeFevre 3); Rebounds: MSU-N 38 (Edwards 12), RMC 30 (Capuch 8); Fouls: MSU-N 18, RMC 12; Fouled out: Cummings.

Rocky Mountain 66, Lights 56

MSU-N – Corbin Pearson 2-10 4-6 8, KJ Rech 4-6 0-0 8, Trevail Lee 3-10 2-2 10, Nick Blount 1-3 0-0 3, Warren Edmonson 6-12 0-0 15, Jermaine Graves 1-5 0-0 2, Dylan Tatarka 2-4 0-0 4, Damian Robinson 1-2 2-3 4, Jesse Vaughan 1-2 0-3 2. Totals: 21-54 8-14 56.

RMC – Rob Nygy 2-5 0-0 5, Ben Moerkerke 1-3 6-10 8, Tyree Anderson 2-4 3-6 8, Taylor Longo 2-8 8-10 13, Malachi Roberts 1-=15 0-0 23, Joe Stulc 2-2 0-0 4, Danny Little 2-4 1-3 5. Totals: 21-42 18-29 66.

Halftime: RMC 32-25. 3-pointers: MSU-N 6-24 (Lee 2, Blount 1, Edmonson 3), RMC 6-13 (Nygy 1, Anderson 1, Longo 1, Roberts 3); Rebounds: MSU-N 25 (Pearson 4, Rech 4), RMC 37 (Nygy 10); Fouls: MSU-N 21, RMC 13; Fouled out: None; Technical Fouls: Little, 13:02 2nd half.

Havre Daily News website