Skylights play UGF on emotional senior night

By George Ferguson
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Whether a basketball team is graduating one or 10 players, there’s always a finality about senior night. It’s always an emotional and heartfelt night, where the kids who have given so much to their respective team and school are honored.

And when the seniors on the Montana State University-Northern women’s basketball team are honored Saturday inside the Armory Gymnasium, it will be all of those things mentioned above. However, one good thing about this senior night will be it won’t be the last time the Northern seniors step on the floor in Havre.

The No. 10 Skylights (10-3, 25-4) close out their regular season Saturday against the No. 24 UGF Argos at 6 p.m. in Havre. MSU-N earned a bye in the upcoming Frontier Conference playoffs, and the Skylights will host a semifinal game March 6. Still, Saturday night’s farewell to the Northern seniors will be a special one, for so many reasons.

First and foremost, all of Northern’s seniors, Taylor Cummings (See related story on Cummings on A8), A’Jha Edwards, Megan Feldman and Taybra Teeters have been outstanding examples on and off the basketball court. They have also touched the lives and hearts of so many fans, students and youths, on Northern’s campus and around the community of Havre. Those things are all important and all four of them are special in that way.

But, the group being honored Saturday night will also be remembered for the incredible success that they have achieved together over the last two seasons. Cummings, who has spent five years at Northern, and Edwards, Feldman and Teeters, who have been here for the last two, have helped MSU-N win 47 games including 18 in the Frontier Conference coming into Saturday night’s season finale with UGF. They helped lead the Skylights to the 2014 NAIA national tournament last spring, and are a lock to get back there next month. In other words, this senior class has had one of the best two-year runs in recent MSU-N history.

“This senior class has been very successful,” said Northern head coach Chris Mouat. “Over the past two years, they have helped us win 47 games and be at or near the top of the nation in defensive points allowed per game. They helped get us back to the national tournament and find ways to be successful there. Beyond that, they’ve collectively led our program. Each provides something different, and they are all so valuable to us.”

They’ve all had great moments individually, too.

Cummings, a Belt native, has become one of the best defensive guards to ever wear a Skylight uniform. A three-year starter and an NAIA Academic All-American, Cummings will leave Northern as one of the best point guards to ever play in Havre. In her senior season, she’s averaging 10 points per game, while leading the Frontier in assists per game and steals per game. Edwards, who came to MSU-N from Sierra Vista, Arizona, has had an incredible impact on the Skylight program. An instant fan favorite, Edwards has averaged 14 points and 11 rebounds in her Northern career, and this season, has racked up a remarkable 20 double-doubles. She holds the Skylight record for rebounds in a game, and was a First-Team All-
Conferece and NAIA Honorable Mention All-American a year ago. She was also named the Frontier's Newcomer of the Year last season.

Feldman and Teeters have both greatly impacted the Skylight program, too, as both joined the Skylights a season ago, and gave Northern a much a stronger inside presence. Feldman, who hails from Estacada, Oregon, is having a great senior season, averaging eight points and six rebounds per game, while also being yet another great defender. Teeters came to MSU-N from Longview, Washington, and like Feldman, has had an impactful senior stint with the Skylights. She's scored a game-high 15 points two different times this season and is averaging five points and three rebounds per night.

“The great thing about them is that, while all are unique, individual personalities, they gel so well together on the court,” Mouat said. “They finished last year at the national tournament wanting more, and they’ve played with a sense of urgency right from the beginning of the season. They have definitely left their mark on Skylight basketball and on me as a coach.”

As for tonight’s game, even with the No. 2 seed in the Frontier locked up, it’s still a big one for the Skylights. MSU-N suffered its worst defeat of the season at the hands of the Argos (8-5, 21-7), an 82-64 setback last month in Great Falls. So, even with the emotions of senior night, the Skylights will have to be at their best to get revenge on their arch rivals from Great Falls.

“Great Falls is a very good team and they are simply full of weapons,” Mouat said. Coach Himmelberg has brought in some great players, and they have had an amazing season. On any given night, I believe they have seven or eight kids who can score in double figures. They just have weapons everywhere you look. And, when we played in Great Falls, they were very, very good. They score in bunches and are running good stuff that suits them well. We simply can’t take a single play off, because they will make you pay. They have five kids averaging in double figures and are simply a huge challenge to guard. We’ll definitely need to be solid on the defensive end and on the boards and we need to execute on offense much better than we did the first time around.”

The Skylights will need to be good defensively, because the Argos boast the Frontier’s leading scorer in guard Erin Legel (5-5) and one of its top post players in Lindsey Abramson (6-2). Add in the scoring prowess of shooting guard Darah Huertas-Vining (5-2) and fellow shooting standouts Nneka Nnadi (5-9) and Stephanie McDonagh (5-9) and the Argos are about as dangerous an offensive team as there is in the NAIA. They come into Saturday night’s battle averaging 77 points per game, while Legel and Abramson combine to average 32 points per night, and together, they scored 43 points against MSU-N the first time out.

UGF is also dangerous because the Argos are playing for seeding in the upcoming Frontier playoffs, and they’re trying to hang on to an at-large berth in the NAIA national tournament. UGF is currently tied with Carroll College for third place in the Frontier standings heading into the final weekend of the regular season.

Saturday night’s senior night game between the Skylights and Argos will tip at 6 p.m. inside the Armory Gymnasium.

No. 10 Skylights (10-3, 25-4) vs No. 24 Great Falls Argos (8-5, 21-7) Saturday at 6 p.m. at the Armory Gymnasium
Havre, MT

MSU-Northern Starters
G Taylor Cummings, 5-7, Sr., 9 ppg
G Molly Kreycik, 5-8, So., 6 ppg
F Natalee Faupel, 5-10, So., 13 ppg
F Megan Feldman, 5-11, Sr., 9 ppg
C A’Jha Edwards, 6-5, Sr., 15 ppg, 13 rpg

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