Skylights and Argos meet one more time
By George Ferguson
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In just under a seven-day span, the Montana State University-Northern Skylights and the University of Great Falls Argos will have waged two Frontier Conference battles inside the Armory Gymnasium. But it’s the second of those two battles that will end up meaning the most.

Just six days after the Skylights crushed the Argos 75-60 in Havre, the two teams will meet again in the Frontier Conference semifinals when the No. 10 Skylights (26-4) host the No. 24 Argos (22-8) tonight at 7 in the Armory Gymnasium. The winner will advance to Monday night’s Frontier championship game.

With so much riding on tonight’s game, it’s fitting that it will pit two bitter rivals against each other, when both teams are having record-breaking seasons. And it’s also fitting that it’s the rubber match in the series. Northern won last week in Havre, but the Argos beat the Skylights 82-64 back on Jan. 30 in Great Falls.

“We played really well against them (Argos) at our place, and they played really well against us at their place,” said MSU-N head coach Chris Mouat. “So, we’re kind of starting over against each other. This is the third game and I expect they’ll come in here and play well.”

One thing Mouat doesn’t expect is much change, on either side. UGF, which beat Lewis-Clark State in the Frontier quarterfinals Tuesday night in Great Falls, didn’t play well for much of last Saturday’s regular season finale in Havre. The Skylights’ suffocating defense held the Argos to just 28 percent shooting for the contest, which was well below the explosive Argos season average. Northern also dominated the glass, and though UGF star Lindsey Abramson racked up a double-double, the Argos didn’t produce a third double-digit scorer for the first time all season, and MSU-N held the Frontier’s leading scorer, Erin Legel to just 11 points.

“Those are constants for us no matter who we play,” Mouat said. “But especially against UGF. They are so explosive, and have so many weapons, that you have to rebound well, and not let them get second chances. And you have to play well defensively. So that will be our goal again.

“As for this game, there isn’t much time to reinvent the wheel,” Mouat continued. “They’ll make some subtle changes and so will we, but the bottom line is, both teams will expect to play well, and it just comes down to who plays better at the end of the night.”

The Skylights are hoping they play as well as they did against the Argos last week. In that game, Northern had four players in double figures, led by A’Jha Edward’s 20 points and 13 rebounds. Northern also got 18 from Natalee Faupel, 16 by Taylor Cummings and 10 points and two 3-pointers from sophomore Molly Kreycik. Add in the hard-working nine points from Megan Feldman, who is one of the top defenders in the Frontier in the post, and the Skylights put together a dominant performance, and are hoping to do the same again tonight.
Meanwhile, UGF, which has already set the school record for wins in a season, is coming off a huge home playoff win over Lewis-Clark State. So, they’re hoping they play much more like they did in that game, and in the one where they handed the Skylights their worst loss of the season, rather than how they played last Saturday night in Havre.

Legel leads the Argos at 17 points per game, while Abramson averages a double-double. But the Argos are much more than two players. They also get hefty contributions from guards Darah Huertas-Vining, Stephanie McDonagh and Nneka Nnadi, all of whom can score in double figures, and score quickly.

“You just have to play really solid defense, play as well as you can,” Mouat said, “because they have so many weapons offensively. They can hurt you in a variety of ways, and they can score so quickly. So we’ll have to be at our very best defensively.”

And for much of the season, Northern has been at its absolute best. The Skylights have compiled their best overall record in more than a decade, they are a lock for at least an at-large berth to the NAIA national tournament in two weeks, and they’re playing some of their best basketball of the season. Since losing to UGF in January, the Skylights have won six of their last seven games, and they’re hoping for a seventh win in that stretch tonight, because that will get them into the Frontier championship game Monday night.

“These kids have been very focused all season,” Mouat said. “They are a great group and they care about each other. Their backs were against the wall when we lost at UGF, but they’ve really responded. The next week, we went out on the road and beat LC State and (Montana) Tech, and ended up winning five in a row. That was really a turning point for this team. So I’m really proud of them for how hard they’ve worked and for what they’ve achieved up to this point because going 11-3 in this league is very hard to do.”

The Skylights will be hoping for yet another big win against a nationally ranked opponent tonight when they host the Argos at 7 inside the Armory Gymnasium. The winner will advance to take on either top-seeded Westminster in Salt Lake City, or host Montana Tech in Monday night’s Frontier championship game.

**No. 10 Skylights (26-4) vs No. 24 Great Falls Argos (22-8) tonight at 7 in Frontier Conference semifinals 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., 16 ppg, 13 rpg

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