Skylights crush Blue Raiders

All season long the Montana State University-Northern Skylights have been waiting to get back to the NAIA national tournament. And when their time on the national stage finally arrived, the Skylights made sure to take advantage of it.

Playing with the memory of last season’s three-point loss to Oklahoma City in the Sweet 16 in the back of their minds, the Skylights wasted no time taking care of business Wednesday in Independence, Missouri, knocking off first-round opponent No. 21 Lindsey Wilson 60-42, and serving notice to the rest of the field, that the Skylights are indeed for real.

“I thought we did a good job of prepping for them,” MSU-Northern head coach Chris Mouat said. “We knew what to expect from them. And we were able to hold their best player to 6-of-15 shooting and them to a low percentage and if you can do that you know you are going to have a good chance to win. And I think a big part of that was our rebounding. When you have that combination of good defense and rebounding you will always have a chance to win and thankfully we scored enough baskets but we will to be better offensively on Friday.”

The No. 10 Skylights, who improved to 28-5 with the win, used a familiar formula to take down Lindsey Wilson as Northern relied on a dominant effort on the defensive end as well as another stellar performance from A’Jha Edwards.

Edwards, the two-time All-American and Frontier Conference Player of the Year showed why she is deserving of all the accolades that come her way as she controlled the action on both ends of the floor on her way to an impressive 25-point performance that also included a game-high 16 rebounds.

Early on in the first half, the Skylights fell behind 15-10 after a sluggish start. Yet, all the deficit did was awaken a sleeping giant as Northern went on a 16-3 run that included a 3-pointer by Taylor Cummings and nine points by Edwards in the span of a few minutes to give MSUN a 26-18 advantage. Edwards even buried a trey of her own as part of the run.

Jacy Thompson also got in on the act for Northern, hitting a three in the final minutes of the opening half as the Skylights scored 20 of the half’s final 23 points to take a 30-18 lead at intermission.

“We kind of struggled with their half-court trap and that caused us to have some turnovers,” Mouat said. “But A’Jha was able to take the game over inside and our kids did a good job of getting the ball inside to her.”

If there was any hope of a comeback in the second half for Lindsey Wilson, the Skylights ended it pretty quickly as they came flying out of the gates with a 7-2 run that featured five points from Natalee Faupel to put Northern in front 37-20.
Just minutes later, Edwards would convert on an old-fashioned three-point play to put the Skylights ahead 40-22 and from there, they never looked back. The Blue Raiders made a few runs and got within 15 at one point but Faupel answered with a two to push the lead back to 17 with 12:08 left and beyond that point, Lindsey Wilson never threatened again.

“When we came out here, we knew what to expect,” Edwards said. “We know that you can’t get too high or too low, you just have to stay level headed and I think that helped us a lot because in the beginning we couldn’t really hit shots but we started getting the hang of it and got it going.”

While Edwards dominated individually, the Skylights, who are known for their defense, played lights out on that end of the floor as well limiting the Blue Raiders to a meager 42 points on just 24 percent shooting from the field.

In addition to Edwards’ 25 points, Northern also got a solid individual performance from Faupel, who finished the game with 12 points, including seven in the second half. Taylor Cummings didn’t score much but she dished out seven assists to go along with five points. Molly Kreycik also scored just four points but pitched in with seven assists of her own in the win.

For the Blue Raiders, Chanel Roberts was the only player to score in double figures as she finished the game with a team-high 16 points in the loss.

Now into the Sweet 16 for the second year in a row, the Skylights will face seventh-seeded Southern-New Orleans (22-4) Friday afternoon. The Knights stunned sixth-ranked Vanguard 84-56 Wednesday night. The Skylights’ Sweet 16 game will tip off at 1:15 p.m. Friday.

“Right now we are just going to sit back and enjoy this win for a few minutes,” Mouat said. “But come 9:45 (Wednesday night) we will be watching our opponents and we will start going to work as soon as that game is over.”

**Skylights are 28-5 overall; Next Up vs Southern-New Orleans Friday**

**Skylights 60, Lindsey Wilson 42**

**Lindsey Wilson** – Hannah DeBruin 0-1 0-0 0, Chanel Roberts 6-16 5-5 18, Billie Hearn 2-4 2-7 6, Kayla Richardson 1-5 3-4 6, Alexus Chinn 0-4 0-0 0 Ashley Johnson 1-11 0-0 2, Kasey Young 2-9 0-0 5, Ranika Rone 0-0 2-2 2, Courtney Sandlin 0-3 0-0 0, Michelle Montgo 1-2 1-1 3. Totals: 13-54 12-18.

**MSU-N** – Jacy Thompson 1-4 0-0 3, Natalee Faupel 5-11 1-3 12, Brandy Lambourne 0-1 0-0 0, Taylor Cummings 1-6 2-4 5, Megan Feldman 3-6 1-2 7, Molly Kreycik 2-4 0-0 4, Ajha Edwards 10-18 5-7 25, Taybra Teeters 2-2 0-0 4. Totals: 24-52 9-16.


**Notes:** Edwards recorded her 25th double-double of the season. UGF also won Wednesday while Lewis-Clark State lost in the final seconds. Because of the mid-day start time Friday, MSU-N fans can read a special game preview online at http://www.havredailynews.com tonight.