Over the last two seasons, the Montana State University-Northern women's basketball team has done a lot of pretty incredible things. But on Friday afternoon in Independence, Missouri, the Skylights did something they haven't done in nearly 16 years.

And, on top of all that, Northern senior A'Jha Edwards did something that hasn't been done at the NAIA national tournament – ever.

Behind Edwards's 35 points and tournament record 28 rebounds, the No. 10 Skylights blew by seventh-seeded Southern-New Orleans 73-54 in the NAIA Sweet 16. The win pushed MSU-N into Saturday's Final Eight where the Skylights will take on No. 1 overall seed and top-ranked Freed-Hardeman of Tennessee.

"To make it to the final eight means you've really done something good," said Northern head coach Chris Mouat. "In the locker room, the kids didn't celebrate a whole lot, because I think they're very focused and very determined to keep this going. But this is something to be very proud of. It's a great accomplishment and a huge, huge win. It's especially huge because of how good (Southern-New Orleans) is. That was a very hard team to prepare for. So I'm very proud of the way we played today."

Northern should indeed be proud, as the Skylights' suffocating defense held the Knights to just 52 points, 39 percent shooting and no 3-pointers. Two days ago, SUNO knocked off sixth-ranked Vanguard and came in averaging over 80 points per game. But once the Skylights shook off some early defensive jitters, the Knights were no match for MSU-N's staunch defense.

"We got after it in the second half," Mouat said. "We gave up too many points in the first half, really. But in the second half, we were very good defensively, and that's saying something, because this is a team who just blew out a really good Vanguard team. And this is a team that is so quick, so athletic and very hard to guard. So, I'm really proud of our effort defensively."

Mouat was also extremely proud of the performance by Edwards, who already had 16 rebounds at halftime, as Northern led 39-33. She broke both her career high's in points and rebounds, as she went 16-of-22 from the field, and yanked down her new school record 35 boards. She also had two blocks.

"It was a monster performance by A'Jha," Mouat said. "She had to carry us a little offensively, because we had trouble getting shots off and handling the ball at times against their pressure defense. They are just so quick to the ball, and make it really tough to even get the ball in or get it up the floor. But I also thought we were decent offensively for much of the game, and credit our guards for handling their pressure as best they could and getting A'Jha the ball. But yes, it was a special performance by her. Just incredible."

Northern also got 16 points from Natalee Faupel and Jacy Thompson banged in a key 3-pointer to spark a 10-3 run to finish the first half. In the second half, the Skylights broke open a tight game with another 14-2 run, and they led by as much as 18 points with under three minutes to go. Megan Feldman chipped in with
seven points and six rebounds, while Taylor Cummings and Molly Kreycik combined for nine assists as the Skylights improved to an incredible 29-5.

Kishaun Williams scored 15 points and Brandy Broome added 10 in the loss for SUNO, which finished the season 24-5 overall.

"I'm very proud of the way the kids played today," Mouat said. "That's a very, very good basketball team we beat. They are so athletic and explosive and they are very tough to score on. So it's pretty exciting that we were able to come out on top and move on."

The Skylights are moving on, to the last eight, for the first time since 1999. This Northern team also took its season one step further than last year's squad, which lost a heartbreaker to eventual national champion Oklahoma City in the Sweet 16.

But, to keep their magical season going, the Skylights will have to turn around and try to slay the biggest dragon in the tournament in top-ranked Freed-Hardeman. The Lions (34-1) are a perennial NAIA powerhouse, and are in the national tournament for the 19th time in the last 24 years.

The Lions are also loaded with talent, including the inside duo of Haley Newby (6-0) and Grace Alonso de Armino, (6-0), both of whom were NAIA All-Americans a season ago.

"They are just a very complete team," Mouat said. "They have two really good post players, who have both scored over 1,000 points and gotten a 1,000 rebounds in their career. But they have so many good players. That's what really jumps out at me. They have a ton of great, athletic guards, who are very physical. They remind me a lot of Westminster in that way. But they are just a really good basketball team in every phase of the game. They are very complete. They are the real deal, and it's going to be a big challenge for us tomorrow."

The Skylights and Lions will play in the quarterfinals at 3 p.m. M.S.T. on Saturday. The winner will face either Campbellsville or Bethel in the Final Four. The other quarterfinals pit Frontier rival UGF against defending national champion Oklahoma City and Oklahoma Baptist against Westmont of California. Westmont stunned Frontier champion Westminster on Friday night.

**Skylights 73, SUNO 54.**

**SUNO -** Natalia Merkulova 1-4 0-0 2, Brandy Broome 7-12 2-2 16, Marquetta Stokes 1-9 2-4 4, Breanna Wiley 0-0 0-0 0, Shonte Dillon 2-5 2-2 6, Jessica Savannah 1-2 0-0 2, Kishaun Williams 11-26 2-5 24, Rayvin Miller 0-10 0-0 0. Totals 23-68 8-13 54

**MSU-N -** Taylor Cummings 1-4 0-0 2, Taybra Teeters 1-1 0-0 2, Cydney Auzenne 0-2 2-2 2, Ajha Edwards 16-22 3-6 35, Molly Kreycik 2-7 0-0 4, Taryn Norby 0-0 0-0 0, Megan Feldman 2-8 3-8 7, Natalee Faupel 4-9 7-8 16, Makhayla Farmer 0-0 0-0 0, Brandy Lambourne 0-0 0-0 0, Jacy Thompson 1-1 2-2 5. Totals 27-54 17-26 73


[Read more](https://www.havredailynews.com/sports/364015455.html)