Round two: Lights and Argos tangle tonight

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Montana State University-Northern's Chase Dirden of Harlem (right) holds on to a Southern Oregon wrestler during an NAIA wrestling dual back in December in Havre. Tonight at 7:30, the Lights will close out their regular season when the host rival, the UGF Argos at the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse. Before the match, the Lights will also honor seniors Austin Ouelette and Evan Mattingly.

In wrestling, emotions are always running high. But tonight at 7:30, the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse, things could reach a fever pitch as the Montana State University-Northern Lights host rival University of Great Falls in the final regular season dual for both teams. The Lights, ranked No. 14 in the latest NAIA Poll will also celebrate senior night tonight, honoring both Austin Ouelette and Evan Mattingly. Ouelette will not be in the lineup tonight due to injury, and the Lights are also slated to forfeit at 157 and 285 pounds due to injury. Both seniors have been consistent and key components to the Northern wrestling program the last few seasons, on and off the mat. Still, with the No. 2 Argos in town for yet another rivalry dual between Montana's only two college wrestling programs, as well as this being the last match for either team before next week's Western Regional in Havre, things should get pretty intense on the mat. "We've explained to these guys that before the dual even starts, we are down by 18 and that they need to go out and wrestle to their potential and make it a war," MSU-N head coach Tyson Thivierge said. "We are saying goodbye to two seniors and we want all of our guys to make a statement heading into the regional tournament. "I always have mixed emotions going to Havre to wrestle being a former alumni," UGF head coach Caleb Schaeffer said. "Armory Gym is always a tough place to wrestle. If we do not come to wrestle it could get ugly very quick if the crowd gets into it. Northern is a little banged up right now so hopefully we can take advantage of some of the forfeits and get rolling." Indeed, the Lights are banged up and short handed, but that won't stop them from making a go at the Argos tonight. Northern has plenty of motivation considering the Argos handled the Lights 35-9 back on Nov. 19 in Great Falls, and they swept MSU-N a year ago. There is also the matchup everybody will be looking forward to tonight. At 184 pounds, UGF's top-ranked Michael French will again battle second-ranked and former Havre High standout Evan Hinebauch. The two have gone head-to-head more than 10 times in the last two years, and have waged some of the best matches in all of NAIA wrestling during that time.
Mattingly, ranked No. 7 at 197 pounds will also battle with UGF's Alex Calvi, ranked No. 4. Those two matches could make or break tonight's dual. "At 184, we have to wrestle our best in order to get him again," Thivierge said. "Last time, Evan beat him in their gym, now he has to keep focused, follow his game plan and execute it. Mattingly has had some great battles with Calvi this season too. He has to keep his feet moving and not stay directly in front of Alex." There's also plenty of intrigue with so many close ties to both programs. Although Schaeffer didn't list him as a starter tonight, UGF will bring former Havre High star and two-time Class A state champion Myles Mazurkiewicz. The former Blue Pony has had a standout freshmen season for the Argos and is currently ranked sixth at 133 pounds. Northern will send out former Harlem star Chase Dirden at 133 where he is slated to see Kyle Middlemist. The Argos also have former Light Byron Kuylen in the lineup at 149 pounds. Kuylen is ranked third at 149 and is making his first trip back to Havre after transferring to UGF last season. Kuylen is slated to wrestle Northern freshman Brandon Leliefeld tonight. Two more big matches for the Lights will come in the lower weights. Another former Blue Pony, Ryan Shelstad, will be called upon to get Northern going when he takes on Bryan Borst at 125 pounds, while another highlight matchup features MSU-N's Steven Quesada and Jason Costello at 141 pounds. Rounding out the dual will be the 165-pound match between MSU-N's Jim Smith and UGF's Michael Hader. Hader comes into tonight's match ranked No. 8 in the NAIA. UGF has another local product in the lineup in Chinook senior Eric Hinebauch, but he will earn a forfeit at heavyweight. "This should be very exciting, but making up 18 points due to three forfeits is very hard," Thivierge said. "Especially against UGF and the talent they will bring. We have to maintain our focus and not let the wheels come off when the going gets tough." Tonight's dual between the Lights and Argos is set to begin at 7:30 at the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse.