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MISSOULA--No place to go but up--and that's just what the Montana Grizzlies plan to do this week when New Mexico invades the Grizzly hardwood Thursday night and Denver comes for a Saturday night clash.

The Silvertips, who lost their seventh league decision of the season with a 92-76 loss to Utah in Missoula last Saturday, are battling to stay out of the Skyline cellar. Twin victories this week could move the Silvertips into sixth place.

Neither contest shapes up as a breather. The Grizzlies are favored, but only because of the home floor advantage. Montana knocked off Denver, 70-69, about a month ago in Denver. But since then the Pioneers have shown definite signs of resurgence, despite the fact that starting center Bob Grinstead has been lost for the season with an ankle injury.

Denver is paced by two of the best performers in the Skyline--center Jim Peay and guard Jerry Cole. Peay, a 6-3 senior who played forward until Grinstead was injured, is one of the best scorers and toughest rebounders in the loop. Cole is a smaller man whose actions closely resemble those of Montana guard Dan Balko.

And New Mexico also is tougher than in former seasons. The Lobos stopped Montana, 77-69, in an overtime game in Albuquerque last month. Their squad boasts the Skyline's best rebounder in forward Tom King, along with high-scoring forward Francis Grant. It will be the fourth meeting of Frosty Cox and his one-time pupil, Bob Sweeney, who played under the Montana Papa Bear at Colorado. Cox's crew has won two of three in the past two seasons.

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Montana defensive play looked ragged in the loss to Utah last week, with the Redskin fast break puncturing big holes in the Grizzly defense. The Silvertips used a zone in that contest, but probably will switch to their normal man-to-man this week. Rebounding, which had been improving all season, also fell off in the Utah contest. Big John Lands had his best night of the season on the boards, but the other Silvertips didn’t offer much help.

Lands’ scoring punch of the past month has moved the versatile Grizzly into a regular forward spot, with sophomore Dan Sullivan moving to the bench for the time being. Since he won a starting job a month ago, Lands has averaged 12 points per contest.

The other Grizzlies have been inconsistent in point production. Balko fired in 29 against Washington State early last week, but fell off to 11 against Utah. Forward Terry Screnar fouled out early in the second half against the Utes and wound up with only seven. Center Duane Ruegsegger had one of his better nights against Utah, but hooped only five points against WSU earlier.

MISSOULA—Montana guard Dan Balko needs 96 points in his final six games to crack the 1000 mark in his career, statistics from 18 Grizzly games reveal. The 5-10 Silvertip also has a slight edge over Terry Screnar for the team scoring lead this season.

Balko has scored 274 points for a 15.2 average, while Screnar is averaging 14.9 points with 268 tallies. Third in line is center Duane Ruegsegger, 178 for an 11.1 average. Guard Vince Ignatowicz has hit 159 for an 8.9 average, forward John Lands 125 for 7.4, and forward Dan Sullivan 119 for 6.6.

As a team, the Grizzlies are badly outshot from the field. Montana has scored 445 of 1235 shots for 36 percent, while the opposition has hit 519 of 1262 for 41 percent.

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