

Capital alum Reyant to split time under center

By JEFF WINDMUELLER Independent Record | Posted: Thursday, October 8, 2009 12:00 am | (0) Comments

Saturday's game

Montana State Northern (2-4 overall, 1-4 Frontier) will host Carroll College (6-0, 5-0) this weekend at 1 p.m. at Blue Pony Stadium.

MSU-Northern freshman Matt Reyant is quickly learning the college football ropes. The Capital High graduate was thrown into the starting role at quarterback, replacing senior Jeff Van Nest before the Lights' 17-14 loss to Montana Tech last weekend. Reyant completed 12-of-23 passes for 145 yards, two interceptions and a touchdown in his first start, which came with little warning.

"It was kind of a surprise," Reyant said. "I was planning on redshirting this year.

"But I've been traveling with the team and all that stuff just to get the experience for years down the road."

The Lights, who started the season nationally ranked and hoping to vie for the Frontier Conference crown - that is, if they could beat nine-time conference champ Carroll College - have suddenly found themselves fighting for a win. They are just 2-4 overall, 1-4 in the conference.

Numerous injuries to the defense has put pressure on the other side of the ball to produce. And, after completing roughly 51 percent of his passes for nine touchdowns and nine interceptions, Van Nest was asked to sit the last game out.

Head coach Mark Samson, also a Helena native who coached the Bruins to three state titles, said the decision to replace him with Reyant wasn't easy. The coach also knows that he wasn't the favorite person on campus last week.

"This is sometimes hard for kids to understand. We don't make choices arbitrarily," Samson said. "When we made that decision, it was because for two weeks we were struggling like mad and we were turning the ball over.

"After two weeks, I didn't think Jeff's confidence was very good."

Samson turned to Reyant, who was recruited after leading the Bruins squad to its third straight state title in 2008.

The 6-foot-1, 200-pound quarterback quickly found out what it was like going from a team that hadn't lost a game in 20 contests to another one that's struggling.

The biggest thing he learned in his start?

"Overall leadership," he said. "Being able to control the huddle in the game, and having my teammates believe in what we're trying to do.

"We're a very talented football team but we just need to come together. I'm hoping as the weeks go on we come together even more."

He said he's trying to get used to the speed of the game, which is likely one of the reasons for throwing two picks, and throwing the ball so much.

With Capital, Reyant rarely had to go to the air as he controlled the Bruins' incredibly strong ground attack.

"It's definitely a lot different throwing the ball 30 times a game versus throwing the ball 10 or 12 times," he said. "A lot of the patterns are the same, as far as executing."

Reyant's touchdown pass came in a 14-point third quarter and was a 14-yard toss to Matt Stuart, which gave the Lights a late 14-10 lead.

A fourth-inning touchdown and a fumble recovery, however, sealed the game for the Orediggers.

Samson said that with such little preparation time Reyant performed well in his first start. He knew that with Reyant's history of winning and leadership he'd make for a good collegiate player, even if it didn't end up coming at the QB spot.

"He's very intelligent, I think he really understands the game better than most give him credit," Samson said.

"Technique wise, he still needs a lot of work.

"But he's a competitor and an enthusiastic leader."

Reyant, meanwhile, doesn't care much about his individual statistics, only about taking his team out of its recent funk.

"To be honest, all I want is to win," he said. "I don't care what the stats are, I don't care how I did individually, all I wanted to do was win."

"Unfortunately we couldn't do that even though we fought hard."

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