

Sports:

Lights getting brighter by the day

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The dog days of August are here. And for the Montana State University- Northern football team, the race is on to be ready for opening day. The No. 18 Lights have just 10 days before their season-opening game with the University of Calgary Dinos in Medicine Hat, and veteran head coach Mark Samson said despite some of the little things which plague every team this year, he likes what he sees in his team's preparation for the upcoming season. "Practice has went well," Samson said. "I'm pretty pleased with the shape we came into camp with. Our kids worked really hard in the offseason and it's showing. The attitude and enthusiasm has been good. I'm pretty happy with where we are right now." Although Northern is progressing so far in camp, the Lights are dealing with the day-to-day struggles which come with two-a-day's and the rigors of getting back into games shape. "I suspect just about every team is going through what we are, and that's the nagging little hurts, not injuries that we're dealing with right now. We don't have anything major, but just things that keep kids out of practice once in a while, and little things that add up and leave us short-handed in certain areas. But we'll deal with those things and keep working hard. That's what fall camp is all about, just getting ready so you're fresh and sharp for your first game." And to that end, the Lights have looked good in all areas at certain times. In their first scrimmage of the year on Saturday, Northern's offense scored plenty of points and moved the ball well, but the MSU-N defense came up with three turnovers as well, despite playing short-handed. All-American linebacker Stetson Koffman, fellow linebacker Justin Montelius and defensive back Jhevon McMillan were all held out of the scrimmage. "I liked what I saw on both ends," Samson said. "We moved the ball well at times and did a lot of positive things on offense. And our defense came away with some turnovers, so all-in-all, I was pleased with how the scrimmage went." Samson is also happy with what he sees up and down his roster. Senior quarterback Jeff Van Nest has played at a high level so far in camp, and running back Ty Cochrell has assumed the No. 1 spot vacated by 2008 Frontier Conference Player of the Year Justin Moe. The running back spot was an area of concern for Northern heading into spring ball earlier this year, but Samson said depth is starting to be the backfield's strong suit. "Ty Cochrell is our No. 1 right now," Samson said. "And he is playing well. But really, we have four guys we can put in there and I feel they will all do a good job. Andrew Mosby had a really solid spring and is still playing well. We have a lot of talent and depth there which allows us to do some different things. "I really like our depth on offense," he added. "The veterans are playing well and the younger guys are really picking things up quickly and that's big for us. On defense, it's the same. The veterans are doing what they're supposed to and the young guys are coming along. We have a lot of talent on defense, and we're just trying to develop some depth right now. But so far, everything has gone well and I'm happy with where we're at." The Lights will conduct one more scrimmage on Thursday at 6:30 p.m. at the MSU-N practice field. Northern kicks off its 2009 season Aug. 29 against the University of Calgary at the Metanex Bowl in Medicine Hat. Tickets are on sale now at the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse.