

## Sports:

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### MSU-N opener will be a unique experience

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The Montana State University- Northern football team had one of its most productive campaign's in school history last season, yet the Lights were notoriously absent from the 2008 NAIA playoffs. While Northern went 7-3 overall and finished second in the challenging Frontier Conference, it was perceived by many that the lack of an eighth victory or and 11th game on the MSU-N schedule may have tipped the scales against the Lights in their hunt for a playoff berth — because there was little doubt whether or not they were one of the 16-best teams in the country last season. The Lights were, yet their season was over in early November. Less than a year later, the Lights have an 11th game on their schedule, and while it's a unique situation, Saturday's game between the No. 18 Lights and the University of Calgary Dinos in Medicine Hat is as important to MSU-N as any other game on their schedule. "It's really important to us," MSU-N head coach Mark Samson said. "First, we were determined not get ourselves into a situation like last year, where having another game on our schedule could have been the difference. So we're happy to have this game this season, and we're approaching it as the biggest game of our season at this point." The game marks the opening of the 2009 season for the Lights but won't count towards Calgary's overall record. The Dinos, who play in the CIS Canada West, the highest level of college football in Canada, open their regular season Sept. 4. Calgary is the defending conference champion and last year reached the national semifinals of CIS football for the first time since 1996. And they should be tough again, returning 18 of 24 starters. And while there is a lot riding on the season-opener for the Lights, the opponent is as unfamiliar as one can get, and the rules will be a little different too. The game will be considered a hybrid of American and Canadian rules football, but there won't be too many differences than what Northern fans are used to seeing every day in football in the United States. The most notable differences will be the dimensions of the field and Calgary's offensive formations. "We really didn't change too much for this game," Samson said. "There's been some little differences we've had to prepare for, as have they I'm sure. But really, the field is the biggest difference, but I don't think that will put us at any kind of disadvantage." A Canadian football field is longer and wider and is configured a little differently than the football fields here in the U.S. The field is in total 150 yards long from the back of one end zone to the other. Goal line to goal line, the field of play is 110 yards long, and the field is halved by a 55-yard-line. The end zone's themselves are much larger in Canada as well, measuring 40 yards from front to back while the width of the field is more as well, measuring 65 yards across. The other major difference fans will see is the uprights. Canadian uprights are positioned right on the goal line and are also much taller (18'6") than the ones here. Another major difference fans will see on Saturday is when the Dinos line up on offense. Calgary will play with their normal 12 men when the Dinos play offense and will be allowed to have a receiver in forward motion. A receiver getting a running start towards the line of scrimmage is allowed in Canadian football, much like fans might have seen in the Arena Football League here in the U.S. When the Dino's are on offense, Northern will have an extra defender on the field, and the same goes for when the Dinos are punting. When MSU-N is offense, the game will go back to 11-on-11. "It's a little different in how we've had to prepare," Samson said. "We'll have a third safety in there when we're on defense, especially because we'll be going up against a lot of four and fivewid sets. But other than that, things will pretty much be how we're used to playing." The scoring for the game will be normal American rules as well, but there is no doubt, with the changes in numbers when each team takes to the field, the game will have a totally unique feel to it. "It's been interesting preparing in some ways," Samson said. "We know a little bit about what they (Dinos) run, and with some of the differences in what we're used to, it's been an interesting couple of weeks. But we've had a really good fall camp. The kids are strong, healthy and excited about the game. "It's different than any game we've ever played," he added. "But at the same time, our focus and preparation is as good as ever. We're really focused on nothing but this game and we're just excited to get on the field because this really is a big game for us." Saturday's game will be held at the Methanex Bowl, a multipurpose football stadium in Medicine Hat. The venue has been used for college and high school games, including the CIS playoffs. The stadium has also hosted several Canadian Football League pre season games. The game is being billed as "Battle of the Border", and the matchup between the Lights and Dinos will lick off at 1:30 p.m. Saturday.

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