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Sports:

Lights close out spring drills with a bang

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The Montana State University- Northern football team has a little over four months until the 2009 season begins. And if the Lights' spring drills are any indication, Northern is headed for another good season. On Saturday afternoon at Blue Pony Stadium in Havre, the Lights wrapped up their spring drills with a scrimmage which saw them run 72 plays, the offense score seven times, and the Northern defense look as stout as ever. "It has been a good spring," MSU-N head coach Mark Samson said. "I feel like we accomplished what we set out to do. As far as the scrimmage goes, there were some very good things, and there were some things we need to do better. The spring was like that, the weather didn't always cooperate, we had our ups and downs, but for the most part, it was a good spring for us, and we came out of it knowing we have the chance to be a very good football team next fall." Quarterback Jeff Van Nest took the majority of snaps this spring and looked sharp all the way through. Van Nest didn't throw a touchdown on Saturday, but he engineered a number of drives which led to scores. In the final scrimmage, he went 9-of-15 for 114 yards and one interception. Backups Chase Hillman and Josh Goodwin both threw touchdown passes in the game, and wide receivers Kyle Kercher and Damon Moe caught TD passes. Northern's deep wide receiver corp was brilliant on Saturday, including returning starter Matt Stuart, who caught six balls for 79 yards. Moe's TD catch was one of the Lights' biggest plays from scrimmage, a 33-yard catch and run for a score. On the ground, the Lights ran the ball 47 times on Saturday, gaining 219 yards. Redshirt freshman B.J. Palmer, who had a strong spring as one of many Lights vying for the starting running back position, led the way with 62 yards on 11 carries, while fullback Ty Cochrell had 58 yards on just eight carries. Cochrell also scored twice. Andrew Mosby and David Puckett, both also in the mix for the starting job, gained 32 yards on Saturday. Mosby had the other rushing TD for the MSU-N offense. Tight end was another area where MSU-N had a hole to fill this spring, and former Havre High standout Kyle Finneman has made the transition. Finneman, also MSU-N's punter, caught several TD passes this spring, and although he didn't see the ball on Saturday, he along with several other young wideouts, made big strides this spring. Defensively Saturday, Northern's veterans stepped to the forefront. Star linebacker Stetson Koffman had an interception, while Jared Weigel had two sacks and Jhevon McMillan had a pair of pass breakups. "The offense played pretty well," Samson said. "I think we had a good spring. Jeff (Van Nest) had a really good spring, and I was really pleased with the offensive line. We only had nine guys there this spring, but they all did a great job. We've got some veterans in that group, and some really promising young guys. We are also pretty deep at wide receiver and the running back situation is good. We gave a lot of guys reps at the position this spring, and they all had their moments. That situation is going to be interesting when we get to fall camp." Northern is looking to replace graduating running back and Frontier Conference Offensive MVP Justin Moe, and all of the Lights' backs in camp this spring made their case for the starting position. MSU-N also has a few newcomers headed this way in the fall, all of which could also vie for playing time in the backfield. The same can be said for the defense. The Lights weren't completely healthy on that side of the ball this spring, and Samson says there are areas of concern. "I think we have a chance to be very good with our front seven," he said. "Our veteran guys played really well this spring. And we had some younger guys like Guy Hamm step up and do well at times. But we also have to develop some more depth on the defense, we know that. We will do that as we get healthy, but the secondary is an area where we have some question marks, and we need to see some more improvement out of our younger defensive players. Still, I am confident coming out of spring that we will be pretty good on that side of the ball next season. The talent is there, we just need to develop some guys in certain areas and get them some experience. That's a big key." With only two weeks of school left, the Lights break spring drills headed towards the summer. And then the Lights will be back in camp by the beginning of August in preparations for their season-opening game Aug. 29 against the University of Calgary in Medicine Hat, Alberta. "I think we accomplished our goals this spring," Samson said. "We got a lot done. We had some younger players step up and really improve, which was a big key. A lot of guys got a lot of reps, we did some good things and we addressed some areas of concern. I'm really excited about the potential of this team, and after this spring, I really believe we have a chance to be a very good football team next season."

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