Lights gaining ground on both sides
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When it comes to scrimmage in football, sometimes, it’s a battle of attrition, and usually only one side can win the day.

But, at least for one day, that was not the case for the Montana State University-Northern football team. The Lights held their second spring scrimmage on Sunday afternoon, and while the offense continued to pile up big numbers, the young MSU-N defense had plenty to smile about by the end of the scrum.

On offense, the Lights racked up over 500 total yards and totaled eight plays of 20 yards or more. And normally, that would be a rough day for the defense, but Northern defensive coordinator Jake Eldridge could see his unit coming together as the scrimmage progressed.

“Overall, the defense played a heck of a lot better (in scrimmage No. 2),” Eldridge said. “I know it may not seem that way sometimes when you give up some big plays and touchdowns, but as far as individual responsibilities, and defensive scheme, they really are starting to understand what we’ve been hammering on them for the last three months. The effort, the attitude and work ethic is there with this group, and as I’ve said before, as the days go on and with more reps, we’ll keep taking steps in the right direction and that’s all I can ask for right now.”

Defensively, the Lights got an outstanding day from NAIA All-American Will Andrews. But that’s no surprise. This fall, Andrews will likely be considered one of the top defensive ends in the NAIA, if he isn’t already. But while Andrews’ play making ability goes without saying, it’s his leadership that impressed his coaches during Sunday’s scrimmage. Andrews finished the scrimmage with a sack and two tackles, but his presence on the field automatically makes everyone around him better.

“Having Will Andrews back made a big difference as you can imagine,” Eldridge said. “He didn’t have a big game in terms of numbers, but his leadership, coupled with his physical ability pressure off the edge and in the run game really freed things up for others on the front.”

In all, the Lights totaled four sacks Sunday, while a couple of young SAM linebackers stepped to the forefront. Former Havre Blue Pony Jordan Van Voast had four tackles and two pass breakups, while redshirt freshman Kaimi Kanehailua led the Lights’ linebackers with five tackles. Another Blue Pony had a strong day as Kyle Finneman showed his prowess in learning to play the safety position. Finneman had four tackles while newcomer Raphael Huizar led all Northern defenders with eight tackles and two pass deflections.

But as strong a day as the defense had, the Lights also showcased just how explosive their offense is becoming. The Lights scored six times in 62 plays, averaged 8.1 yards per play and had no turnovers on the day.

“I thought our offense executed very well ,” MSU-N offensive coordinator Kyle Samson said. “Our two quarterbacks played very good and our skill position kids made a lot of big plays both in the running and passing game.

“Its been awhile since we have had over 500 yards in a scrimmage around here, so I was very pleased with their effort and play making ability.”
In the quarterback battle, both Lights got a chance to make strong impressions. Returning starter Derek Lear went just 5-of-7 for 60 yards and one score, but his feet did plenty of damage as he rushed for 51 yards on just five carries, and he ran in one of Northern’s two touchdowns on the ground.

Meanwhile, the aerial assault came by way of Travis Dean. He went 12-of-22 for 206 yards and three scores. Running back Justin Montelius also threw one pass, and it was a big play, covering 23 yards. MSU-N also ran some “wildcat” with star receiver Orin Johnson.

And the MSU-N receivers had a big day as a result. Brandon O’Brien caught five passes for 90 yards and a score, Kyle Johnston had four catches for 41 yards and a TD, and Mick Miller broke away for two huge plays, including a 37-yard TD catch. Brandt Montelius also caught his second TD of the spring as the Lights chewed up 215 yards on 32 carries.

On the ground, the Lights were equally as effective. Starting running back Stephen Silva ran for 73 yards and averaged 12.2 yards per carry. Josh Wilson also had a strong day, totaling 46 yards on the ground. But as good as all of Northern’s skill players were, Samson says they wouldn’t have been if not for the play of the Lights’ veteran offensive line.

“‘I think the main thing that we can attribute to our success on offense has been the play of our offensive line,’” Samson said. “They did a great job yesterday in both run blocking and pass protection and really have had a great spring. We know that it all starts up front and if our big boys are playing well than our offense has the ability to be pretty good.”

And right now, Northern’s offense is playing well, and with the defense also hitting stride, this last week of the spring should be an exciting way to end things for the Lights.

“We still have a lot that we can improve on and get better at and we look forward to this last week of spring ball and finishing next Saturday on a great note,” Samson said.

The Lights will conclude 2011 spring drills with their Maroon/White Game Saturday at 2 p.m. at the Havre High practice fields.

**Lights’ Scrimmage No. 2**

**RUSHING** – Chandless 2-12, Silva 6-73, Lear 5-51, Wilson 7-46, J. Montelius 2-4, Dean 5-11, Radden 2-9, O. Johnson 2-5, VandenBos 1-4.

**PASSING** - Lear 5-7-60, Dean 12-22-206, J. Montelius 1-1-23.

**RECEIVING** – O’Brien 5-90, Johnston 4-41, J. Montelius 1-18, O. Johnson 0-0, Miller 2-75, Torgerson 1-9, Gruber 2-30, Jansen 1-5.