Lights shine bright in scrimmage
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Two weeks and some more hot practice days are what stands between the Montana State University-Northern football team and its season-opening tussle with the University of Montana-Western Bulldogs.

But the Lights used last Saturday as a chance to crank up preparations for the upcoming season.

Northern held its first scrimmage of fall camp Sunday at the MSU-N practice fields, and there was plenty to like about what the Lights achieved at the end of the first full week of practice.

"I'm pretty pleased," MSU-N head coach Mark Samson said. "I thought the defense played really well today. They produced three turnovers, our defensive line really set the tone, and I thought we had a very good day in the secondary.

"The offense had their good moments too," he added. "We did some good things in the passing game at times, and I thought Stephen Silva did a good job running the football. It was a pretty competitive first scrimmage."

From outward appearances, it did appear that the defense won the day, especially with three INTs to its credit. Junior safety Matt Reyant had a pick early on, a beautiful leaping grab on a Derek Lear pass, while former Havre High School standout and sophomore linebacker Jordan Van Voast came up with an INT of his own as he jumped in front of a would-be receiver on a Travis Dean pass. Senior linebacker Landry See also came up with a pick after a touchdown pass bounced off Mick Miller's foot and into the hands of See.

The defense also played physical all day with one of the biggest hits coming from freshman safety Chris Hamilton, who connected with wide out Orin Johnson in a big collision. The defense also held the No. 1 offense out of the endzone late in the scrimmage on a goal line period.

"The defensive line played real well," Samson said. "As a whole, I thought the defense ran around and played really hard. They had a good day."

But the offense had plenty of things to like as well on a hot Saturday morning in Havre.

MSU-N ran 78 plays, scored five touchdowns and racked up 586 yards on offense, including seven plays of 20 or more yards. One big play came at the end of the day when Dean dropped in a long pass to sophomore Brandon O'Brien for a score. O'Brien finished the day with three catches for 57 yards, but the highlights belonged to sophomore Mick Miller who hauled in three passes for 125 yards. Miller proved tough to cover all day with his speed and size, and he was certainly one of the bright spots on an already bright day. Another former Blue Pony, freshman Corderro Strickland also hauled in a TD catch from freshman quarterback J.R. Finai. Strickland finished the scrimmage with four catches for 45 yards, while Johnson added four catches and newcomer Kyle Johnston had three catches and a 10-yard reverse for a score.

The quarterbacks were paced by veterans Lear (12-16-176-2) and Dean (9-18-149-1), but Finai and freshman Trent Godsey also showed promise. On the ground, the Lights rolled up 188 yards on 31 carries and got scores from Johnston, fullback James Chandless and freshman Zach McKinley.
"Our offensive line is a little banged up right now," Samson said. "So I thought that we ran the ball as well as we did was good. The offense showed some signs of good things, but we also made some mistakes.

"So I was pleased with this being our first scrimmage," he added. "We saw some good things and we know there are a lot of areas we need to get better. We have things we have to get cleaned up. But this has been a good first week of practice and now we'll go back to work."

**Northern notes:**

Zach McKinley, the younger brother of former MSU-N standout Luke McKinley, led all rushers with 85 yards on just four carries, while Stephen Silva added 40 yards on nine carries. New MSU-N kicker Juan Garcia looked strong from several distances on field goals and also boomed several punts Saturday. Northern starting offensive lineman Joe Pittman was held out of the scrimmage with a foot injury, while starting center Jorge Magana also missed the scrum due to a family obligation. MSU-N's next scrimmage is set for Thursday at 6 p.m.

**MSU-N Scrimmage #1**

Rushing — Chandless 1-1, Silva 9-40, Lear 3-12, J. Montelius 5-11, McKinley 4-85, Dean 1-8, Johnson 3-6, Vandenbos 1-1, Godsey 1-2, Finai 2-12.

Passing — Lear 12-16-176-2, Dean 9-18-149-1, Finai 6-7-57, Godsey 1-5-10.

Receiving — O'Brien 3-57, Johnston 3-48, Johnson 4-37, Miller 3-125, B. Montelius 2-13, Torgerson 2-17, Strickland 4-45, Vandenbos 1-4, Silva 1-12, J. Montelius 3-26, McKinley 1-6.