Responding: Lights cage Bears
George Ferguson - Havre Daily News sports editor
Sunday, September 25th, 2011

The Montana State University-Northern Lights needed a bounce-back win and did they ever get it.

Northern had a tall task in front of it when the Lights traveled to Billings Saturday to face the No. 17 Rocky Mountain College Battlin’ Bears, especially after their 48-29 homecoming loss to Eastern Oregon just a week earlier.

But showing no ill effects from the setback to EOU, the Lights forged ahead, knocking off the Bears 35-32 Saturday afternoon in Billings.

It was MSU-N’s first win over a ranked opponent in several years, but more importantly, the Lights avenged to bad losses to the Bears a season ago, and improved to 3-1 in the Frontier Conference ahead of this week’s huge showdown with Carroll College in Helena.

"We had a good week of practice, but I was still a little concerned with how we would play this week," Northern head coach Mark Samson said. "You just never know how kids are going to respond to a loss, especially one like last week’s game that was hat a lot of hype and emotion around it.

"But as a team, the kids played great against Rocky," he continued. "They did a lot of really good things offensively and defensively, and just overall, I thought we played really well. I’m really proud of them for getting after it the way they did."

Northern’s offense was particularly sharp against Rocky’s vaunted defense. The Lights racked up 515 yards, 25 first downs and ran almost 20 more offensive plays then the Bears. And on the ground, MSU-N was extremely good, running for 283 yards, including a career-high 181 yards from Stephen Silva as well as 51 yards from fullback James Chandless.

And the Bears came in as one of the top-rated defenses in the Frontier.

"We did some really good things offensively, we even set some school records," Samson said. "(Stephen) Silva had a huge game, James Chandless really got rolling and I thought we were just really good up front in the run game and that seemed to open a lot of things up for us.

"And I thought Derek Lear had a great game," he added. "He did some really good things in the passing game, made some really smart decisions with the football, and as an offense we just played a really good football game. I was very pleased."

The Lights grabbed an early lead when Kyle Johnston scored on a five-yard run in the first quarter. From there, it was a back-and-forth affair for a while with Rocky tying the game at 7-7 early in the second quarter. Northern responded with a Lear to Orin Johnson 4-yard TD pass but the Bears tied the game at 14-14 when Eric Buer took the ensuing kickoff back 98 yards for a score. Northern struck last in the first half when Silva broke off an 18-yard run to put the Lights ahead 21-14 at the break.

Rocky came right back in the second half however, but with the game tied at 21-21, Justin Montelius caught a 4-yard pass from Lear to put the Lights ahead for good. Northern went up 35-24 when Johnson
caught his second TD pass of the day with 9:35 left in the game, and while Rocky tacked on a score with no time left on the clock, the Lights' defense did the job down the stretch.

"I thought our defense really played well for most of the game," Samson said. "We had a lot of guys step up and make plays and we did a really good job of taking away their (Bears) running game. That was key for us."

Silva finished the game with 181 yards on 21 carries, while Lear added 44 yards on the ground. Through the air, Lear was a very efficient 20-of-25 for 232 yards and two scores. Johnson had two TD's and 53 yards on five catches, while Johnston had three catches for 58 yards. Montelius also came up big in the passing game, with three catches for 26 yards and a score.

"It was a good win for us," Samson said. "I'm just really proud of the kids for stepping up and responding this week. They gave a great effort and this was a big win towards what we're trying to accomplish this season."

The Lights are now tied with Carroll for second place in the Frontier heading into Saturday's game in Helena. RMC dropped to 2-2 in league play.

Northern and Carroll will kick off this Saturday at 1 p.m. at Nelson Stadium. The game can be seen throughout Montana on local CW Networks.

**Lights 35, Rocky Mountain College 32**

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**First quarter**

MSU-N — Kyle Johnston 5 run (Juan Garcia kick), 9:52

**Second quarter**

RMC — Levi Sutton 6 pass from Bryce Baker (Nick Knell kick), 13:10
MSU-N — Orin Johnson 4 pass from Derek Lear (Garcia kick), 3:15
RMC — Eric Buer 98 kickoff return (Knell kick), 3:01
MSU-N — Stephen Silva 18 run (Garcia kick), 0:43

**Third quarter**

RMC — Jacob Scharbrough 1 run (Knell kick), 12:16
MSU-N — Justin Montelius 4 pass from Lear (Garcia kick), 7:55

**Fourth quarter**

RMC — Knell 37 FG, 14:50
MSU-N — Johnson 11 pass from Lear (Garcia kick), 9:35
RMC — Nevin Blankenship 15 pass from Baker (Baker run), 0:00

**Team statistics**
Individual statistics

Rushing — Northern, Stephen Silva 28-181, James Chandless 10-51, Derek Lear 10-44, Kyle Johnston 1-5, Orin Johnson 2-2, Justin Montelius 2-0. Rocky, Bryce Baker 7-26, AJ Tolbert 3-23, Nate Ray 4-14, Sean Coleman 2-7, Jacob Scharbrough 1-1, Isaac McCreery 6-23.
