MSU-Northern Game Day Notebook: Miller helps bring back the Fairfield connection

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In Saturday’s 41-20 victory over the Montana Tech Orediggers at Blue Pony Stadium, the Fairfield duo was back in action. Miller exploded onto the scene Saturday, catching four passes for over 150 yards and two touchdowns. Three of his catches went for huge gains, including a 49-yarder which set up Northern’s first-quarter score, as well as a 74-yarder which went for his second touchdown of the day.

Miller got more looks in the passing game due to an injury to starter Brandon O’Brien and he made the most of his opportunities. He also said the connection he has with Lear made for some big plays on Saturday.

“Derek and I have great chemistry on the field,” Miller said. “We have played together for a long time now. We really know each other very well and that makes a big difference in games. It felt really good to be making big plays with him again.”

Miller had just 11 catches on the season coming into Saturday’s game. But he found himself wide open against a solid Montana tech secondary, and with the combination of a 6-4 frame and very good speed, he made the Diggers’ pay time and time again.

“We studied a lot of film this week as an offense, and the coaches did a great job of making the right calls today,” Miller said. “We knew going in where we could hit them, where their weak spots were and where we could make big plays. The coaches did such a great job of having the right plays called, and Derek (Lear) made all the right reads. And I’m just glad I was able to get my chances and make big plays to help our team win a big game.

“I’m really happy for Mickey Miller,” Northern head coach Mark Samson said. “Brandon O’Brien has been a bit hobbled lately and Mick went in there today and had a great game. It’s nice to see him get involved more in the offense because he’s a very good football player and he gives our already dangerous offense another big receiving threat.

“I was joking with Derek and Mick earlier that we were ready to see more of that Fairfield connection,” he added. “And it sure happened today. They had a great game together.”

Block party

Last week in a 30-27 loss at UM-Western, Northern had a punt blocked which turned into a touchdown, which eventually led to the Lights being shut out in the first half. On Saturday, the Lights got one back.

Already leading 20-7 at the start of the third quarter, Northern senior defensive end Will Andrews came through the line and blocked a Montana Tech punt less than three minutes into the second half. The block set the Lights up with great field position and five plays later, the Lights were in the endzone and ahead 27-7 after Lear found Kyle Johnston on a scoring strike.
“We saw that they (Tech) did some things differently with their punting,” Samson said. “We thought we might get to one today, or at least have a chance to. That was a big play because it not only added to the momentum we already had, but it gave our offense a great chance at another score, and we took advantage of it.

“I thought we had a really solid day on special teams and that was necessary because Montana Tech always plays well on special teams and you have to counter that. So all the guys on those units did a great job for us today.”

**Running wild**

The Lights have certainly started to establish the run, and Montana Tech is no slouch either.

Northern junior Stephen Silva went over 100 yards for the fourth time this season, while Northern fullback James Chandless scored his fourth rushing touchdown in the last two games. MSU-N is all the way up to second in the Frontier in rushing, and the Lights are averaging a great 7.6 yards per carry.

Tech freshman Pat Hansen showed what he could do as well. Against a dominant performance by the MSU-N defense, Hansen still managed 185 yards on a workman-like 31 carries. Northern did hold Hansen scoreless on the day, and that’s the big stat that matters most.

**Thank you for all you do**

The pregame festivities for Northern’s Military Appreciation Day were certainly inspiring. The Montana National Guard gave the Lights a large inflatable helmet to run out of, while the Northern coaching staff wore camouflage hats. A large flag was unfurled for the National Anthem, with several Northern players helping. They included former Havre Blue Pony Tyson Gruber and Lights’ wide receiver Brandon O’Brien, who was presented with the Marine-Navy Medal before the contest.

A special thanks goes out to all of you who serve our country each and every day. You, along with the Montana National Guard, made it a very special day at Blue Pony Stadium.