Lights hit the road one last time
Lights go for a rare road win at EOU
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The Montana State University-Northern football team is hungry for a win each and every week. But they are starving for one in the state of Oregon – because it’s been a while.

In fact, it’s been a long while since the Lights have beaten Eastern Oregon anywhere.

But that’s what MSU-N is gunning for when the Lights visit No. 25 EOU Saturday afternoon in LaGrande, Ore. Northern comes into Saturday’s game riding a losing streak to the Mounties which dates back to September of 2008, and Lights’ head coach Mark Samson is looking for that to change. Especially with how well the Lights played in a 41-20 home victory over Montana Tech last Saturday.

“It’s been too long since we’ve won a game down there,” Samson said recently. “We just haven’t played very well there in the past few trips. But we did play a really good first half against them there last year, and I think our kids are pretty confident going into that game.”

Indeed. The Lights built a large lead on the Mounties last year at Community Stadium, only to see Chris Ware make that lead go away in the second half. Ware, the stellar senior EOU quarterback has had a habit of having big games against the Lights during his career. Case in point, Ware was nearly flawless in helping the Mounties beat the Lights 48-29 last month in Havre. Ware hasn’t lost to the Lights in his last six starts against Northern, and he comes into Saturday’s tilt, which will be his final home game of his career, having thrown for 1,947 yards and 18 touchdowns this season, with just six interceptions.

Ware has help too. EOU running back Kevin Sampson will also be playing his final game at Community Stadium. Sampson has 880 yards rushing this season, and has gone over the 100-yard mark three straight times against Northern. And with a bevy of talented receivers, including tight end Dillon Bedford, Samson knows all too well how tough EOU’s offense is to stop, and especially on senior day.

“They (Mounties) are just very, very good offensively,” Samson said. “And we have no doubt they’ll be fired up to play us. That’s why we have to make sure we go in there ready to play from the start. We’ll need to match that intensity and play very hard for 60 minutes.”

While EOU is playing its last home game of the season, the Lights are playing their fourth road game in the last six weeks. It hasn’t been easy for Northern, and now the Lights will make their longest and toughest trip of the year.

However, MSU-N is still very much alive in the Frontier Conference race, and Saturday’s game against EOU would go a long way towards furthering Northern’s desire to finish strong.

MSU-N started that drive with last week’s win against Tech. The Lights’ defense came to play, as Landry See registered 14 tackles and Will Andrews had two sacks. The Lights also got an INT from Chris Hamilton
and forced the Orediggers into four turnovers. Northern will have to be as good or better Saturday against an EOU team which averages 32 points and 400 yards of total offense.

But as well as Northern’s defense needs to play, it’s the offense which can push the Lights over the hump in Oregon. Northern continues to lead the league in total offense at 455 yards per game. The Lights are led by Derek Lear, who averages a league-best 266 yards per game passing. Lear also hasn’t thrown an interception in his last two outings. And while MSU-N is the top passing team in the Frontier, the running game has come on strong, as well as more weapons emerging. Stephen Silva is third in the Frontier in rushing, James Chandless has scored four TD’s in his last two games and both Orin Johnson and Kyle Johnston are threats to run the ball from the wide receiver position. And with Mick Miller and Brandt Montelius also getting more involved in the offense, and Brandon O’Brien possibly returning this week from injury, the Lights are every bit as dangerous an offense as EOU is. And Northern has chances to exploit an EOU defense which has struggled some in a stretch where the Mounties have lost three of their last four games after a perfect 5-0 start to the season.

“I think we’ve started to show some consistency the last couple of games,” Samson said. “And we’re going to need to continue that because our last three games are against very good teams. We’re playing pretty well right now and hopefully that continues.”

The Lights will battle the Mountaineers Saturday at 2 p.m. M.S.T. in LaGrande, Ore. Saturday’s game can be streamed live on the internet by logging on to www.havredailynews.com Northern returns home to face Rocky Mountain College next Friday night.