College football night games don’t happen often at Blue Pony Stadium. But one will happen on Friday night. And it’s ironic that the first night game the Montana State University-Northern football team played under Mark Samson was against the same opponent that will be in town on Friday night.

Back in November of 2004, the Lights beat the Battlin’ Bears under the Lights at Blue Pony Stadium, giving Samson his first career home victory as the Lights’ head coach. Eight years later, Northern will once again play the Bears after sunset, though this time around, both teams are significantly improved.

And both teams will have something to prove on Friday night. Both Northern and Rocky come into the night game after tough losses on the road. The Lights were lit up by Eastern Oregon’s Chris Ware to the tune of a 41-14 defeat in LaGrande’ Ore., last Saturday, while Rocky was soundly beaten by a Montana Tech squad which hadn’t won a Frontier Conference game before last Saturday’s 34-14 win over the Bears in Butte.

So now, two teams with playoff aspirations will be fighting it out in Havre, to keep a winning season alive. The Bears and Lights, who’ve played some barnburners in the past, are both 4-4 in conference play coming into Friday night’s game.

Friday night’s showdown between Rocky and Northern will have a different look to Northern fans who are used to seeing the Bears wing it all over Northern’s defense. And who are also used to seeing Rocky score tons of points but give them up too.

This time around, it’s Northern which has the top offense in the Frontier, and the Lights also have the top passing quarterback in the league. Sophomore Derek Lear leads the Frontier in passing at 250 yards per game and he’s also tops in the league in total offense, accounting for 2999 yards each outing. Lear has thrown for 1, 750 yards, 14 touchdowns and seven interceptions this season, and he’s rushed for 300 yards. Northern also has the bevy of receivers, like the Bears’ teams of the past did – and still do. While Rocky’s A.J. Tolbert and Levi Sutton are stars, Northern’s group of Kyle Johnston, Orin Johnson, Brandon O’Brien, Mick Miller, Brian Torgerson and running back Stephen Silva have come together to form the most talented corps in the conference. Johnston leads the league in yards per catch at 16.2, while Johnson is second in catches per game. Johnston, Johnson and O’Brien are all in the top 10 in the league in both catches and receiving yards.

On the other side of the coin is Rocky’s defense. The Bears are second in the league in scoring at 24 points per game, second in the league in total defense at 359 yards per game and second against both the run and pass. Rocky takes the ball away too. Defensive backs Ridge Fuentes, Thomas Ackerman, J.T. Fitzgerald and Eric Buer, along with linebacker Travis Bertelsen have combined for 12 picks this season. Fuentes and Ackerman each have three, and combined, the Bears have returned seven INT’s for scores this season. And with quarterback Bryce Baker only throwing three interceptions this season, the Bears are way ahead of the curve in turnover margin.

So it’s like old times Friday night. Rocky and Northern. A top rated offense and a top rated defense. It should be entertaining.
Speaking of defense. Montana Tech certainly stood up on Saturday. The Orediggers got head coach Chuck Morrell his first league win, and the Diggers’ did it defensively. They held Rocky to just 14 points and forced Baker into a costly interception that was returned for a score by Tech linebacker Connor O’Neil. Tech came into Saturday’s game last in almost every defensive category, but the Diggers’ certainly showed they have pride on that side of the ball.

Now Tech will go to Carroll on the Saints’ senior day. Never any easy task, but in the Carroll/Tech rivalry, anything can, and usually does happen.

With two games left in the regular season, Carroll has clinched at least a share of its historic 12th straight Frontier title. With one more win, the Saints can wrap up the league title all by themselves.

The streak means that head coach Mike Van Diest has won the league title every year he’s been the head man at Carroll. That alone is impressive given what can go wrong with a team in any given season. This season’s impressive mark is Carroll’s ability to bounce back. Carroll had fans nervous after a week two loss at home to Eastern Oregon, but the Saints have won seven straight games by an average margin of 16 points per game. Carroll’s closest win since the loss to EOU came two weeks ago when the Mounties kept the game to within 10 points against the Saints.