Game Day Feature: A special odyssey comes down to one game
MSU-Northern senior Will Andrews has had quite the journey while wearing a Lights uniform
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Senior Day is always an emotional day for any college football player. But when you consider the journey MSU-Northern defensive end Will Andrews has been on, Saturday’s finale against Carroll College at Blue Pony Stadium will not just be emotional, but also a tribute to and a culmination of one great career.

Andrews came to Northern in 2007 and has started 37 games, including 10 games his freshman season. He’s followed in the footsteps of some great Northern defenders, including Beaumont Somerfeld, Keno Detrick, Josh Glahn, Dilan Saisbury, Kennedy Anderson, Marc Samson and many others.

Andrews is already a three-time Frontier All-Conference defensive end and a two-time NAIA All-American. Those are accomplishments that can never be taken away.

But in fact, there was a time when football was basically taken away from the hard-nosed, 6-1, 235-pound speed rusher from Sandpoint, Idaho. He was injured near the end of the 2008 season, and it would be the fall of 2010 before Andrews got back on the field.

So his story isn’t just one of a great player wrapping up a great career – it’s one of a journey which has included hardship and perseverance.

“This all started for me when I took my recruiting trip here,” Andrews said. “The guys I met, the seniors at the time, it just made me feel like this was the place for me. Right away I felt this was a program that just wants to win. As long as I’ve known coach Samson, I’ve understood he just wants to win. That’s really meant a lot to me because that’s how I am. I’m a very competitive guy."

“So even through the injuries and the hard times,” he added. “I’ve never once thought this wasn’t the spot for me. I’ve never thought about giving up. I was raised to see things through, to stick things out, and no matter what has happened in my career, I’ve loved every second of it. These years at Northern have been an incredibly special part of my life.”

Special in more ways than one.

Over four years of playing and coming back from a severe leg injury, Andrews has racked up 193 tackles, 21 sacks, including a career-high and Frontier leading seven this season, as well as 42 tackles for loss, a school record. Andrews has reached double digits in TFL’s in three of his four years at Northern, including a career-high 13 last year, which led the Frontier. He has 10.5 TFL’s heading into Saturday’s swan song with the Saints.

“Will is a tremendous football player,” Coach Samson said in an interview earlier this season. “He’s just very gifted as an athlete. He could probably play a lot of different positions and play them all successfully,
he’s that talented. He’s a great defensive end with a great motor and he’s been very dedicated to our program.”

But as good as Andrews has been on the field for a Lights’ team which had some great defenses just as Andrews arrived in Havre, he will remember his career for much more than the tackles, the sacks and the hits on opposing quarterbacks. He’ll remember it for more than the highs of winning and the lows of enduring some tough seasons while at MSU-N.

“As far as special games go, I’ll never forget starting against Dickinson State my freshman year,” he said. It was so hot, and I played very down. I remember calling my parents after the game and I had never been that physically drained before. That’s when I realized how hard college football is and how hard you have to work to be successful. I think me and some of the older guys on this team have tried to instill that in the younger guys, that you have to really work at this. And I’ve tried to instill in them that they need to then instill that in the guys who come in later.

“But as for the memories I’ll always have, it’s really the things that happen between the lines,” he added. “It’s all the great guys that I’ve played with over the years, the friendships I’ve been able to build with all of my teammates, on campus and with so many great people I’ve come to know in this community. We have such a tremendous fanbase here. It’s the camaraderie, the practices, the workouts, the times spent with the coaching staff, it’s those things that make the memories. Those are the things I’ll always remember about my time here.”

Andrews isn’t quite done making memories yet either. He relishes a final shot at the saints, a team he says he’s grown to highly respect over the years. And he’s also making sure that he leaves more than stats as his legacy to the Lights. Win or lose on Saturday, he’s proud of how far the Lights, for which he’s been a captain the last two seasons have come.

“I think the future is very bright here,” Andrews said. “The two seasons before this were tough, but I think even last year we all talked about how talented this team was, it just didn’t quite click for some reason. But I think we’ve made a huge leap this season. And with so many great young players on this team, and as long as this program has coach Samson, the future is always going to be bright.

“It’s really special for Senior Day to be our last game and to play Carroll,” he added. “And there’s nothing I’d like more than to go out with a win against them. But for me, my memories of my time here won’t be the wins and losses as much as they’ll be how special this time has been. It will be the friendships and the relationships I’ve had the chance to build while I’ve been here. It’s just been a very special time, and a time I’ll never forget.”