Lights wrap up the spring with a bang
George Ferguson
Tuesday, April 17th, 2012

On a sunny afternoon at Blue Pony Stadium, the Montana State University-Northern football team took its last live snaps until August.

The Lights conducted their annual spring game Saturday afternoon, and both sides of the ball were especially sharp. However, as expected, the high-powered MSU-Northern offense stole the show.

The Lights’ offense racked up nearly 500 total yards scored five touchdowns and kicked one true field goal in nine 11-on-11 series.

“I think we executed well in all aspects,” Northern’s first-team all-conference running back Stephen Silva said. “The offensive line did excellent and so did the receivers, quarterback and running backs. And we are definitely on track to where we need to be, we are always getting better and we still have more time to continue getting better until opening day when we face Carroll.”

The Lights got rolling with a touchdown pass from Derek Lear to Kyle Johnston on the first series of the scrimmage. Lear also led a nine-play TD drive, culminating in a 20-yard scoring strike to Brandon O’Brien on the third series of the day.

And the big plays kept coming.

The Lights scored again on the fourth series, this time on a six-play drive where Lear hit wideout Mick Miller from 35 yards out. The running game also got going on the next drive when fullback James Chandless broke free for a 40-yard TD run. Northern also scored on a 8-yard TD pass from Lear to John Jansen on the eighth drive of the game.

Juan Garcia was also true with a 40-yard field goal on the second series of the afternoon.

“I thought our offense clicked very well early,” head coach Mark Samson said. “Derek Lear played very well. We kind of laid off the hitting on him because Travis Dean banged up his knee last week, but I though Derek (Lear) played very well, and our receivers did a good job too. I think our offensive line played well when it was all said and done too.”

Lear was the only quarterback to compete Saturday and he was especially sharp. The junior-to-be threw for 321 yards on 19-of-24 passing with no interceptions. Johnston paced the receivers with four catches for 72 yards, while O’Brien racked up 43 yards as did Miller. Brandt Montelius and Josh Wilson each caught a pass for 45 yards as Lear completed balls to 11 different receivers Saturday.

On the ground, Orin Johnson rushed for 51 yards out of the “wildcat offense”, scoring one rushing TD in the process, while Silva gained 32 yards on five carries. Freshman Zach McKinley added 32 yards on three
totes. As an offense, Northern ran for 176 yards on the day and overall, totaled a whopping 10.14 yards per play.

And if Saturday is any indication, the MSU-N offense is ready for its season opener in August against Carroll. However, the MSU-N defense had plenty to cheer about too on Saturday.

The Northern defense forced punts on two straight series, one in which Ryan Craig earned a sack on Lear. The other was a turnover on downs, as the defense stifled Northern’s attempt at picking up a fourth-and-short. The defense did the same thing on the last series of the scrimmage.

“A lot of it is just reaction,” sophomore linebacker Jared Rohrback said. “The first half we had a tough time getting our keys and reacting to them, but towards the second half we let loose a bit. We read our keys better and flew around better as well.

“I thought Jared Rohrback played extremely well as did Ryan Craig and Tyler Phillips,” Samson added. “Our secondary still isn’t where it has to be. Our secondary needs to get better because this league throws all the time. But we can get better there, if we get a better pass rush up front too. Our defense woke up during the second half of the scrimmage and they played a lot better than they did early on. I saw some good things, but we still have a lot of work to do.”

Craig finished the game with five tackles and two sacks. Phillips had four tackles, one tackle for loss and two hurries. Rohrback, who was injured for much of last season, really stood out, totaling eight tackles, while former Havre Blue Pony Jordan Van Voast had four. Josh Baum totaled five tackles and Hunter Chandler added four, as well as the only pass breakup of the afternoon.

And now that the scrimmage and spring ball are in the books, the Lights can fully turn their attention to the next phase – the opening of fall camp and preparations for Carroll, which is set for Aug. 24 in Havre.

“I was pleased with the scrimmage overall,” Samson said. “The kids did a good job. They worked hard. I felt like guys were out there playing hard. I think we accomplished a lot.”

Maroon and Gold Spring Game


Passing – Lear 19-24-0-3-321, Montelius 0-1-0.