Game Day Notebook: Montelius brothers fight together to the end

MSU-Northern Game Day Notebook

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Sunday, August 26th, 2012

Senior MSU-N running back Justin Montelius is one of the most veteran players the Lights have. And when his number was called on Friday night he stepped up in the Montana State University-Northern Lights 31-6 loss to Carroll College at Blue Pony Stadium.

Montelius ran for 20 yards and also caught three passes for 20 more, but it was his heart which stood out the most. Montelius took a huge hit from Carroll linebacker Joe Dunning in the second quarter on a short screen pass.

But with the game all but decided in the fourth, Montelius again was running up the sidelines and instead of taking the easy way out and stepping out of bounds, he lowered his shoulder and took on a Carroll defender head on. It was another big collision, but Montelius showed some true character by making the play even when the outcome was in hand.

It was also a good night for Montelius’ younger brother Brandt. After a solid fall camp, the 6-2 junior from Missoula saw plenty of balls come his way on Friday night and finished the game with four catches. And he too showed that he was playing right to the end as he made up for an earlier drop of what would have been a sure touchdown by getting open on the last play of the game and catching a TD pass from Derek Lear to give the Lights six points before the game ended.

Hi-Line hero runs wild

Chance Demarais has run for a lot of yards playing football on the Hi-Line. After all, he was a a star running back for the Malta Mustangs and he knows how to rack up the yards on the fields in North central Montana.

However, he missed his chance to run on the turf at Blue Pony Stadium in what was a record-setting 2011 season with the Carroll College Fighting Saints. Demarais, who was heavily recruited by Northern out of high school, didn’t make the trip to Havre last November as he was injured and the Saints rested him for their 2011 NAIA playoff run.

But on Friday night, he didn’t miss an opportunity to show the Hi-Line fans what he can do. The reigning NAIA Player of the Year rushed for 142 yards on 17 carries as his Saints took down the MSU-Northern Lights 31-6 in a season-opening Frontier Conference game.

Demarais got Carroll going right away, pounding his way through the Northern defense for 31 yards on four carries on the opening drive of the game. He capped that drive off with the first of two touchdowns on a night when he certainly was the focal point of the Carroll offense.

"I don’t really think about anything but the football game when I’m out there,” Demarais said when asked about playing so close to home. "But it was nice to be back up here playing on the Hi-Line. We played well tonight.”
Demarais really showed off his amazing combination of power and speed on Carroll’s first drive of the second half. He ripped off two long runs, including a tackle-breaking 20-yard touchdown run which gave the Saints a 14-0 cushion, and which also sparked the Carroll offense to three straight scores in the third quarter.

"A one-score ball game is never a position you want to be in," Demarais said. "We just tried to eliminate any mistakes we were making and coach made a couple corrections on offense."

Demarais, who didn’t play against the Lights last November, was bottled up by Northern in an early-season game last year in Helena. He was leading the NAIA in rushing when Northern came to Nelson Stadium last season and the Lights’ defense held him to a modest 67 yards. But on Friday night, he did a little showing off while he was just 90 miles from home. And the result was an almost unstoppable Saints’ ground game and a huge road win in Havre.

**The injury and penalty bug**

Not a lot went right for the Lights’ offense on Friday night. Northern had drives stalled in several different ways, including key dropped passes and costly penalties. In the first half alone, the Lights had six penalties, including three false starts and three holds which negated positive plays. In all, Northern wound up being flagged 15 times for 188 yards on the night.

"Penalties really hurt us on offense tonight," Northern head coach Mark Samson said. "And you just can’t make those mistakes against Carroll. They always seem to make you pay for those kinds of mental mistakes. And that’s what’s most disappointing tonight. We have a pretty veteran group of guys who have played a lot of football in this league, and we made way too many mental mistakes tonight."

Injuries were also key. Carroll’s run defense is always good, but a second-quarter injury to Northern senior Stephen Silva hampered the Lights’ chances of running the ball even more. And on a gusty evening in Havre, effectively running the ball was going to be important to the Lights’ chances. Silva did return, but only gained 20 yards in the game. In 2011, he averaged 102 yards per outing.

Northern also lost junior receiver Brandon O’Brien to what appeared to be a leg injury in the first quarter, while star receiver Kyle Johnston limped off early in the fourth quarter after running up to fair catch a punt.

**Huge turnout**

The attendance for a Northern game at Blue Pony Stadium is always bigger when the Lights are playing Carroll College. But Friday night’s crowd was the biggest a Northern game has had in almost five years.

An estimated 3,100 fans packed the stadium on what turned out to be a less-than-summer night. The crowd also included full football teams from Fairfield and Choteau High Schools.

Temperatures were already in the low 60’s by kickoff and a stiff 30 MPH north wind made it feel much cooler. Never-the-less, it was thrilling to see such a huge turnout, and here’s hoping that all Northern home games attract that much attention from the Havre faithful this season. The crowd also included full football teams from Fairfield and Choteau High Schools.