Mounties nip Lights in LaGrande, again
George Ferguson
Sunday, September 9th, 2012

The Montana State University-Northern football team has suffered some gut-wrenching defeats at the hands of the Eastern Oregon Mountaineers in recent years.

And the Lights’ most recent trip to LaGrande, Ore., turned out to be one of the most heartbreaking of them all.

On Saturday afternoon, the No. 16 Mounties made it a home-opener to remember as EOU freshman kicker Marc David kicked a 37-yard, game-winning field goal with two seconds left to lift his team to a 17-14 triumph over the Lights, who are now off to a difficult 0-2 start to the 2012 season.

And the loss will certainly overshadow an impressive showing by Northern’s defense, as well as a statistically dominating day by the MSU-N offense.

The Lights outgained the usually high-octane Mounties 433-349 in total offense, with Stephen Silva rushing for 88 of Northern’s 226 yards on the ground. Silva also scored the game-tying touchdown from eight yards out late in the third quarter, which put the Lights into a 14-14 tie with the Mounties.

"We did some really good things defensively," Northern head coach Mark Samson said. "I felt like our defense played well enough to win the game. We also did some very good things on offense. But when we needed the big plays, at critical times, we couldn't come up with them.

"Mistakes really cost us too," he added. "We had some penalties that really hurt us and we made some mental mistakes at critical times. At the end of the day, we just didn't do enough things well in order to win the game."

Northern had plenty of opportunities to win the game in the fourth stanza, but overall, the Lights’ offense stalled in the red-zone most of the day. MSU-N had four possessions to go ahead in the final 15 minutes, including three straight trips into EOU territory with under nine minutes to go. But a missed field goal by freshman Trevor Baum, a turnover on downs and a Derek Lear interception thwarted MSU-N's chances to put EOU away and leave Community Stadium with a victory.

Meanwhile, Northern’s defense held strong most of the day, including the fourth quarter when the Lights continually kept getting the ball back from EOU. The MSU-N defense limited the Mounties to just 126 yards rushing, and kept both EOU quarterbacks at bay most of the day. MSU-N also got two turnovers, but the Lights struggled to take advantage, and with EOU holding the ball in the final seconds, the Mounties did just enough to give David a chance at a game-winner. And the winner was his first collegiate field goal of his career.

"I knew what I had to do," David said. "It's something I've done so many times in practice, and I knew I could do it. It feels great, and I'm so glad I could help the team get this win. It's a great team to be a part of."

"We just weren't very good in the red-zone," Samson said. "And that's the second game in a row that it's been like that for us. That's something we've got to get cleaned up. We have to be able to points on the board in those situations."
"For whatever reason, it's not clicking for us right now," he added. "There were some things we could have done differently. We could have kicked a couple of field goals in the first half instead of choosing to go for it. Maybe things would have turned out differently. But again, overall, we're just not getting it done when we get down there close to the endzone, so we have to go back to work and maybe simplify some things. Because we need to get scores on the board."

Northern struck first in a game which saw plenty of big plays but few points.

On their second possession of the opening quarter, the Lights marched right down the field and scored when Lear hit sophomore David Wilson with his first career TD catch from seven yards away.

And the Lights kept moving the ball all over a very good EOU defense, which was led by Howard McDonald, who racked up an EOU record 25 tackles and a sack on the day. He also scored a rushing TD for the second straight week. But inside the redzone, MSU-N fell short several times. And that left EOU with chances.

The Mounties finally got their offense going with just minutes left in the first half, as Tyler Pine hit Jace Billingsly from 21 yards out to tie the game at 7-7 at intermission. For the first 21 minutes of the game, the Lights had held EOU to just 38 yards of offense and one first down. But EOU seized the late, first-half momentum and scored on its opening drive of the second half to take a 14-7 lead. Silva tied it up with his scoring run, which was set up by a big pass play to Kyle Johnston. But that would be the final time the Lights would get on the board on a hot and windy day in Oregon.

Lear completed 18 of his 34 passes for 207 yards. The junior threw one touchdown pass and two interceptions. Lear also carried 12 times for 43 yards and senior Justin Montelius had six totes for 43 yards. Johnston finished with a team-high five catches for 84 yards, while Orin Johnson caught four balls for 44 yards and Mick Miller added three catches for 33 yards.

On defense, Jordan Van Voast and James Chandless led the Lights with 11 tackles each. Chandless, a converted fullback, had a strong game filling in for the injured Jared Rohrback. Matt Reyant had five tackles, a sack and two forced fumbles and Josh Baum and Tanner Varner added six tackles apiece.

The loss dropped Northern to 0-2 in the Frontier Conference on a day when frontrunner Carroll College was beaten badly by Montana Tech. Meanwhile, the Mounties took advantage by improving to 2-0 and tying Rocky Mountain College for first place in the Frontier.

"It's always tough to lose a game on the last play like that," Samson said. "But we just have to bounce back. We have to respond and go get a win this weekend. We need to win and get on a roll. We'll work hard, make some adjustments this week and go to Dickinson hungry for a win. We're going to be OK."

The Lights are back on the road this Saturday, when they renew their rivalry with Dickinson State University. Northern returns home to face UM-Western on Sept. 22.

**Eastern Oregon 17, Lights 14**

| MSU Northern | 7 0 7 0 — 14 |
| Eastern Oregon | 0 7 7 3 — 17 |

**First quarter**
MSU-N — David Wilson 7 pass from Derek Lear (Trevor Baum kick), 2:28

**Second quarter**
EOU — Jace Billingsly 21 pass from Tyler Pine (Marc David kick), 0:16

**Third quarter**
EOU — Howard McDonald 1 run (David kick), 9:57
MSU-N — Stephen Silva 9 run (Baum kick), 1:45

**Fourth quarter**
EOU — David 37 FG, 0:14.

**INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS**

**Rushing** — MSUN (48-226): Trevor Baum 2-34, Orin Johnson 1-5, Derek Lear 12-48, Kyle Johnston 3-9, Justin Montelius 6-43, Stephen Silva 23-88. EOU (40-133): Tyler Pine 11-25, Jason Simonis 3-11, C. McGinnis Parker 10-31, Howard McDonald 2-(-2), Sean Hurlbut 14-68.

**Passing** — MSUN: Derek Lear 18-34-2, 207 yards; Orin Johnson 0-1-0, 0 yards. EOU: Tyler Pine 15-23-0, 192 yards; Jason Simonis 6-18-1, 24 yards.

**Receiving** — MSUN: David Wilson 2-21, Orin Johnson 4-44, Mick Miller 3-33, Kyle Johnston 5-84, Brian Torgerson 1-11, Justin Montelius 14. EOU: Kedrick Starr 1-6, Jace Billingsley 9-77, Joseph Johnson 2-36, Matt Orthmann 2-2, Sean Hurlbut 4-50, Justin Reynolds 3-45.

**So Close**

*Lights are 0-2 in the Frontier, 0-2 overall; Next Up: at Dickinson State this Saturday*

**Frontier Conference Standings**

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**Saturday**
Eastern Oregon 17, MSU-Northern 14
Montana Tech 38, Carroll 20
Rocky Mountain 52, Southern Oregon 30
UM-Western 28, Dickinson State 13

**Saturday, Sept. 15**
MSU-Northern at Dickinson State
Rocky Mountain at Carroll
Montana Tech at UM-Western