Game Day Notebook: Dawgs can never seem to catch O'Brien
MSU-Northern Game Day Notebook
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Two years ago, Montana State University-Northern wide receiver Brandon O'Brien made his Lights’ debut with two long touchdown catches in a season-opening win over the UM-Western Bulldogs in Dillon.

Since that time, O'Brien, a 6-1, 210-pound junior from Orlando’ Fla., has had other big games for the Lights, but he’s also had to deal with a host of injury problems.

However, on Saturday, in a thrilling 46-39 win at Blue Pony Stadium, a healthy O'Brien was back to torching and torturing the Western defense. O'Brien caught eight passes for a school-record tying 208 yards, as well as three touchdowns. And though he had a big game, with two TD's last week at Dickinson State, he’s also had to endure an injured hamstring this season, which had him miss much of the season-opening Carroll game, as well as all of the trip to Eastern Oregon.

But on Saturday afternoon, the only thing missed was Western defenders trying to keep up with him. O'Brien was wide open on deep scoring plays of 39 and 75 yards, and even in the short-passing game, he was pretty much uncoverable as he converted three first downs for the MSU-N offense, and scored on a fade route in the third quarter. Even when he didn’t catch balls, he was so open, Western had to interfere with him and take a pass interference penalty to prevent another touchdown in the second half.

"It was a really good day for me," O'Brien said. "I just kept running my routes and running by guys. That's my job. But all the credit goes to Derek (Lear) and the offensive line and the rest of the receivers, as well as my coaches who prepare me so well for every game. Derek was throwing great balls all day, the offensive line was great in pass protection all day and all of our receivers were getting open and making plays. When you have great teammates like I do, it makes my job pretty easy.

"I think you saw today, when Brandon is healthy and feeling good, he's one of the best there is in our league," Northern head coach Mark Samson said. "He had a great game. He just kept making plays and he really gave us a big lift today."

O'Brien was also lifted by the memory of a lost loved one, and he said, emotionally after the game, he wanted badly to perform for that loved one, and perform he did.

"I lost my grandfather recently," O'Brien said. "So I was playing with a pretty heavy heart today. But I wanted to honor him with a great game, and I feel like I did that. I wish he could have seen me today, because I know he would have been proud. I'm just really thankful I was able to go out and play a great game and share this win with all of my great teammates and coaches. That's what it's really all about."

Should have been more
Northern and Western combined for 85 points and 1,100 yards of offense on Saturday afternoon, but the Blue Pony Stadium scoreboard should have been even busier.

The Lights’ Kyle Johnston appeared to score the game’s first touchdown when he caught a Lear pass on the 2-yard-line and took it into the endzone. However, contact was made and the ball was popped loose, and the officials decided to call it incomplete, though the rule clearly states, that a touchdown is scored the moment the nose of the football breaks the plane of the goal-line.

Northern got another possible score erased in a strange end to the first half. The Lights drive the ball down to the 1-yard-line with under 20 seconds left in the half, and on second down, Justin Montelius appeared to punch the ball in on a short run. However, the officials did not signal touchdown and Montelius lay at the bottom of a pile of Bulldogs, while his offensive teammates got in formation to spike the ball because the Lights were out of time outs at that point. Strangely, the officials did stop the clock, though it usually doesn’t stop on running plays, but it did stay still at 10.5 seconds while the pile was unstacked. Once Montelius was allowed to get up, the clock ran and Lear spiked the ball, stopping it with 2.5 seconds, giving Northern a fourth down and one more shot at a score which would have put them ahead by two TD’s at the half.

However, what ensued was mass confusion. First, the head official asked for there to be one second put on the clock, which is still enough time for Northern to run a play. Then, after more discussion, the official announced that the half was over and never allowed Northern to run a play. No explanation was given and it looks as though that one will remain a mystery.

Western also left points off the board, but those came by way of drops. The biggest drop came when Western QB Jeff Logan through a long bomb up the right sideline, to a streak Josh Lords with just under :20 left in the game and the Bulldogs trailing by seven. But the ball went right through Lords’ hands, and instead of sending the game into overtime, the Bulldogs were pretty much out of realistic chances at that point. And though Rashad Peniston had a huge game, he dropped a wide open pass in the endzone on Western’s first possession of the game, while teammate Matt Lickfold did the same just two plays before.

**Feeling good again**

Kyle Johnston and Brandon O’Brien have both been bit with the injury bug this season. Johnston even missed last week’s loss at Dickinson State and was a question-mark coming into Saturday’s tilt with the Bulldogs.

But instead of being hurt, the duo combined for 16 catches and 335 yards receiving. Both players looked faster than ever on Saturday, and they spent the day leaving Western defensive backs in their wake. They also combined for five of MSU-N’s seven touchdowns, and together, they picked up seven first downs as well.

**Records fall**

The Lights set or tied several offensive marks in Saturday’s win.

MSU-N’s 668 yards of total offense broke the old single-game mark of 572, which was set back in 2009 against RMC. Northern’s 46 points was just three points shy of the single-game record of 49, which was set against RMC in 2006.

Lear set a new mark for passing yards in a game with his 485 yards, and also broke the mark for passing TD’s in a game with seven. He also tied his own single-season record with 32 completions, which he first set a year ago against Eastern Oregon.

O’Brien tied the record for receiving yards in a game with 208, and also tied the mark for most TD catches in a game with three, which also belongs to Andy Smith in 1999 and Nick Bodeman in 2006. His 26 yards per catch Saturday is also the second-best single-game performance in MSU-N history.