Game Day Notebook: Lights show they can throw the ball too

MSU-Northern Game Day Notebook

George Ferguson
Sunday, October 14th, 2012

There’s no question the Southern Oregon passing attack is special. It didn’t take a person with a P.H.D. to figure that out as the Red Raiders beat the Montana State University-Northern Lights 65-34 Saturday afternoon at Blue Pony Stadium.

But lost in all the SOU awesomeness is, the Lights still have a pretty impressive air attack as well.

Northern quarterback Derek Lear hit the 500-yard mark for the second time this season, and in a first quarter which saw the Lights lead 21-10, Lear threw for 231 of those yards and three of his five touchdowns on the day. And that’s all after bouncing back from an interception on the very first play of the game.

In all, Lear went 23-of-37 for 500 yards, five touchdowns and two INT’s Saturday. It was the second time this season Lear has thrown for more than 500 yards in a game, and with four games left in the season, he’s already broken his own school record of 19 touchdowns in one season. After throwing five TD’s on Saturday, Lear now has 20 on the season.

And it wasn’t just Lear who put up the huge numbers on Saturday. Junior wide receiver Brandon O’Brien is having a huge campaign, even after he missed two games early on with a hamstring injury. On Saturday, O’Brien came up big with 173 yards on just seven catches, and he scored twice as well, including on Northern’s third offensive play of the game when he broke wide open for a long TD.

O’Brien is now averaging over 22 yards per catch, which leads the entire NAIA, and he’s quickly climbing the leaderboard in the Frontier Conference in both catches and yards per game.

In all, Lear hit eight different receivers in Saturday’s loss, with junior Brandt Montelius making three huge catches for a career-high 98 yards. Justin Montelius also set the Lights’ first score up on a big catch and run on a screen, while Orin Johnson once again made big, crucial catches across the middle of the field and Kyle Johnston was his usual, reliable self.

Numbers never lie

There were plenty of telling stats from Saturday’s high-scoring game at Blue Pony Stadium, and Southern Oregon put up most of them.

SOU quarterback Austin Dodge threw for over 500 yards and six touchdowns, and while Northern was hoping to limit Dodge’s production, the Lights knew they weren’t going to shut down the passing game completely. After all, Dodge has thrown for over 300 yards in every game this season, and has now gone over 500 yards in two straight games.

“Everybody in this program knew that we had the potential to be great,” said Dodge, who’s led SOU to a combined 133 points in the last two weeks. “The players are buying in week-by-week and this program just wants to win so much.”
But what really was a big difference were the rushing stats. While Dodge put up 56 passes Saturday, the Red Raiders also managed to rush for 227 yards, while Northern, which was second in the Frontier in rushing coming in, saw star tailback Stephen Silva gain just 10 yards on 10 carries. When one team can be so balanced and put up the kinds of numbers the Raiders did Saturday, that’s usually pretty impossible for an opponent to overcome.

And two more glaring numbers that stuck out for the Lights on Saturday were in the way of penalties and time of possession. Northern was called for 11 fouls totaling 111 yards on Saturday, and that really hurt the Lights both on offense, and especially on defense. But the time of possession was most shocking. SOU generally snaps the ball within the first 10 seconds of the play clock, and the Raiders want to score as fast as possible.

They did that on Saturday, yet their offense still managed to be on the field for an incredible 45-plus minutes, and they ran over 100 plays. Those numbers are as telling and as staggering as any the Red Raiders put up.

**Hard work**

All Northern defenders were busy Saturday afternoon, but the MSU-N linebackers had much of the action. Northern linebackers were playing in coverage a lot against the SOU passing attack, and they put up some big numbers of their own.

The MSU-N’s starting three of James Chandless, Jordan Van Voast and David Arteaga combined for 42 total tackles against SOU. All three players came into the game already in the Top 10 in the Frontier in tackles for the season, and all three certainly will move up the list after Saturday’s wild game.

Chandless continues to have an impressive season, now with 63 tackles on the year, while Arteaga has also been outstanding in his first year as a starter. Van Voast, a former Havre High product finished in the Top 10 in tackles a season ago, and continues to just play steady, hard-nosed football.

**Records at home**

Saturday’s loss to SOU ended a three-game home stand for the Lights, who will now go on the road for games at Carroll College and Montana Tech.

But Northern took advantage of the extended stay in Havre, in more ways than one.

Not only did the Lights go 2-1 at home over the last month, but they tied or broke 13 different school records during the course of the last three games. The most recent record fell on Saturday when Lear broke his own single-season mark for touchdowns in a season. But Northern also tied or broke eight individual offensive records and five team offensive records in its three games against UM-Western, Rocky Mountain College and Southern Oregon, all at Blue Pony Stadium in Havre.