Battlin' Bears leave Lights in the cold

George Ferguson

Sunday, November 11th, 2012

A longer than usual game day turned into a long night for the Montana State University-Northern football team. And in the process, a long season came to an end.

On Saturday night in Billings, the Lights fell to the Rocky Mountain College Battlin’ Bears, 32-22 under the lights at Daylis Stadium. The regular season finale was moved to a 6 p.m. start because the Lights couldn’t travel to Billings until Saturday morning due to the winter storm that slammed into Montana this past week.

And with the tough loss, and the long day, the Lights ended the season with a disappointing 3-7 record, while Rocky snapped a three-game losing streak to the Lights, and ironically, avenged last year’s night-game loss to Northern in Havre.

“"It was a long day,” Northern head coach Mark Samson said. “But that’s not an excuse. The bottom line is, we just didn’t get it done. We played well at times, we led them at halftime, but we just didn’t make enough plays in the second half to get it done.”

Once again, turnovers and penalties were the Lights’ undoing.

Northern overcame a horrendous start by scoring 16 unanswered points in the second quarter. Rocky jumped out to a 14-0 lead as Bryce Baker capped the Bears’ opening drive with a 28-yard touchdown, then he threw a 5-yard TD pass to Luke Wildung near the end of the first period.

Northern shook off its cold start on a frigid night when Derek Lear backed up a Trevor Baum field goal by connecting with Brandon O’Brien on a 43-yard pass play to make the score 14-10. And with MSU-N’s defense stifling the Bears, the Lights took the lead on a 10-yard Stephen Silva touchdown just before half. Baum’s extra point was blocked, one of three kicks the Bears blocked on the night, but the Lights still went into halftime with a 16-14 lead.

“"We played great in the second quarter after a bad start to the game,” Samson said. “We felt like we were in control of things at that point. But we had some turnovers and some breakdowns in the fourth quarter that were costly, and that’s seemed to be the story of our entire season.”

Northern’s defense continued to control things in the third as the Lights allowed just one Nick Knell field goal, while Lear connected with Orin Johnson on a 12-yard scoring pass to give MSU-N a 22-17 lead heading into the final stanza.

But early in the fourth is where it all unraveled for the Lights.

Rocky drove down to start the fourth stanza, and took the lead on a one-yard plunge by Travis Bertelsen, then picked up a Silva fumble after he a 20-yard gain. To make matters worse for Northern, Baker turned the turnover into seven more points when he hit Cole Cattalen for 53 yards on the very next play. The two-minute stretch saw a Northern five-point lead turn into a Rocky 10-point advantage, and the Lights never recovered.

“"We had four turnovers and that was pretty much the story,” Samson said. “We just didn’t make the plays when we needed too. We just didn’t get it done.”
Lear finished the game with 17 completions for 214 yards and two touchdowns, but he also had three picks. O’Brien caught five balls for 73 yards and Johnson caught five for 65. Silva rushed for 57 yards in the final game of a brilliant career. The Bears’ defense held MSU-N to under 300 yards of total offense, while the Lights came in averaging well over 400 yards.

Baker, who missed last week’s historic win over Carroll, finished the game with 186 yards through the air and another 36 on the ground. Cattalen had a huge game with seven grabs for 131 yards, while the Bears rushed for 159 yards to just 70 yards rushing for the Lights.

Defensively, MSU-N got 11 tackles from Tyson Patterson, 10 by James Chandless and nine by Jordan Van Voast. Mike Carbone had a sack in his fifth straight game.

And while the loss ended Northern’s season at 3-7, the Bears go into the offseason riding high, having won three straight games to finish at 5-5 in the Frontier Conference and 6-5 overall.

Northern goes into the offseason looking to regroup and get better, as the Lights return most of their starters on offense, but do graduate nine key players overall.

“We just have to roll up our sleeves and go back to work,” Samson said. “This was a tough season. It’s disappointing right now. But we just have to go back to work and do the things we need to do to become a better football team.”

Southern Oregon beat Montana Tech Saturday to clinch a share of the Frontier championship. Tech (8-2) travels to unbeaten Morningside this Saturday in the first round of the NAIA playoffs, while SOU (8-2) travels to St. Ambrose for a first-round matchup. SOU finished the regular season ranked No. 10 in the last NAIA Coaches Poll. Tech dropped to No. 14 and Carroll finished at No. 22.

**Rocky Mountain 32, Lights 22**

**Northern** 0 16 6 0 — 22  
**Rocky** 14 0 3 15 — 32

**First quarter**  
RMC — Bryce Baker 28 run (Nick Knell kick), 12:58  
RMC — Luke Wildung 5 pass from Baker (Knell kick), 2:49

**Second quarter**  
**MSU-N** — Trevor Baum 28 FG, 11:36  
**MSU-N** — Brandon O’Brien 43 pass from Derek Lear (Baum kick), 8:12  
**MSU-N** — Stephen Silva 10 run (pass failed), 3:48

**Third quarter**  
RMC — Knell 31 FG, 9:43  
**MSU-N** — Orin Johnson 12 pass from Lear (kick blocked), 4:40

**Fourth quarter**  
RMC — Travis Bertelsen 1 run (Cole Cattelan pass from Baker), 14:21  
RMC — Cattelan 53 pass from Baker (Knell kick), 12:51

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INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING — Northern: Stephen Silva 15-57, Kyle Johnston 2-3, Justin Montelius 4-6, Derek Lear 11-13, team 1-(-9). Rocky: Isaac McCreery 19-61, Bryce Baker 5-36, Pete Anderson 6-47, Clint Linthicum 8-14, Michael Robinson 2-(-6), Cole Cattelan 1-11, Travis Bertelsen 4-8, team 1-(-12).


TACKLES — Northern: Tyson Patterson 11, James Chandless 10, Jordan Van Voast 9, Matt Reyant 8. Rocky: Jacob Barit 8, Jake Scharbrough 7, Chris Music 6, Eric Buer 5.

Final Frontier Standings

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Saturday

Rocky Mountain 32, MSU-Northern 22
Southern Oregon 46, Montana Tech 28
Carroll 36, Dickinson State 0
UM-Western 41, Eastern Oregon 20