Lights bright on both sides of the ball
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The Montana State University-Northern Lights are working their way through a solid spring, and even the weather is going right for a change.

But sometimes, gauging just how well a team is doing in practice means seeing some live game action. And that’s exactly what the Lights got Saturday. Northern held its first full scrimmage Saturday at the Havre High practice fields, and the Lights were plenty productive, on both sides of the ball.

"We just wanted to get these guys out here so they could hit each other for a while," Northern head coach Mark Samson said. "But we did some good things and now we can go back and look at film. I will hold out judgement on if we were really good or really bad. But overall it wasn't bad and we got to do some pretty good hitting."

Indeed. There was some pretty good hitting all day, and while the offense racked up some outstanding numbers, when the No. 1’s went head-to-head, the Lights’ defense did a great job of keeping the ball out of the end zone. The MSU-N offense racked up 464 yards and five touchdowns on the day, but the Lights scored just once when going head-to-head with the No. 1 defense.

"The defense played well, while the offense didn't execute very well," Samson said. "We have to learn consistency, because what sometimes happens in spring ball is, the offense looks good and the defense doesn't, or the defense looks good and the offense doesn't. But I give the defense credit because they have to step up, our defense has to be better next year."

The No. 1 offense’s only TD against the No. 1 defense came on the final drive of the day when starting quarterback Derek Lear drilled a 30-yard touchdown strike to Brandt Montelius. It was a good day for Montelius, who totaled 90 yards on five catches. He also hauled in three of Northern’s five TD’s. Orin Johnson led a solid receiver group with 8 catches for 80 yards, while Trevor Baum continued to impress with three grabs for 45 yards. Tight end John Jansen also caught a touchdown.

Lear finished the day completing 12-of-19 passes for 136 yards while Travis Dean threw for 120 yards and three scores. Lear also rushed for 49 yards on 12 carries.

On the ground, transfer running back Jai Johnson continued his outstanding spring, running for 93 yards on 14 carries. He also scored once and broke six tackles on the day. Freshman running back Jake Skelton from Ronan also looked good. He totaled 46 yards on 12 carries. The Northern offense also went the entire day without committing a turnover.

"We just have to get consistent," Samson said of his offense. "We played a lot of different combinations on the offensive line today, so now we just have to find the right combination."

And as happens often with spring ball, and when teams are going against each other, the momentum changes. A week ago, the Northern offense seemed unstoppable, while on Saturday, it was the Lights’ defense which shined.
Trevor Baum, playing both ways, had several pass breakups in the secondary. Hunter Chandler and Josh Baum led the way in tackles, Kaimi Kanehailua and Jordan Brusio had sacks and freshman defensive end Patrick Barnett really shined.

"I think our defense just flew around and hit hard," Barnett, a 6-3, 230-pounder from Billings said. "We go to practice every day with the idea of getting better and better. Today we just wanted to come out and hit the offense as hard as we could, that is pretty much it.

"We have some kids on the defense that are getting better and better," Samson added. "I am impressed with a lot of our young kids, and I thought our defensive line played well, and so did our linebackers. They ran around and made some plays."

The Lights will continue spring practice through this week, while conducting their annual spring game Saturday at 12 p.m. at Blue Pony Stadium.

**Lights Scrimmage No. 1**

**Passing** – Lear 12-19-136-1; Dean 10-17-120-3.

**Rushing** – J. Johnson 14-93; Skelton 13-46; Lear 12-49; Dean 5-23; Woodhall 1- (-3).

**Receiving** – O. Johnson 8-80; B. Montelius 5-90; Woodhall 1-15; Jansen 2-20; T. Baum 3-45; J. Johnson 1-7; Agostino 1-7; Keltner 1-5.

**Offense**: 81 Plays, 464 Yards, 5 TD’s.