Freshly cut grass and crisp white lines can only mean one thing for the Montana State University-Northern football program, the start of another season.

And it didn’t start with a bang, or even with the clash of helmets and pads striking together. Instead, the first practice of the season began with a quick speech from veteran head coach Mark Samson and a quick team cheer on three, as the Lights took to the practice field Sunday morning on the campus of MSU-Northern in Havre.

At 10:30 a.m. sharp, the Lights took the field, a very significant step for a program that has already gained a lot of attention with its key returning players, new freshman, and incoming recruits. And if one thing was made clear Sunday, it was that now is the time to get better.

The Lights began two-a-day drills with a one-hour practice Sunday morning. It was a quick and short start, but there wasn’t a minute or second wasted. The offense, defense, and special teams all got work, and the main focus out of the gate was intensity, tempo, getting reps, and in one word, finishing. It didn’t matter if it was one rep, a series, or a team drill, every individual was expected to execute at a high level and finish on a positive note. There was a learning curve for the incoming freshman, but Sunday was not about taking it easy, being comfortable, or making excuses. If a player wasn’t better after the hour practice, than they were prior to the hour practice, something along the line didn’t go according to plan.

Following stretching and agilities, the Lights didn’t spend more than 10 minutes on one thing, and parts of the practice schedule took as little as just two minutes to accomplish. And while the offense and defense were split up for the majority of the morning, at times, they did come together. Quarterbacks and receivers worked on routes, while the offense as a whole covered different formations and cadences. And the defensive backs could be found working on their technique, while the defense as a whole touched on different drills, formations, and techniques as well.

There won’t be any practices done in full pads for a couple of outings, but that didn’t stop the Lights from taking that first step towards a successful 2013 season.

“It feels good to be back out here running around,” senior wide receiver Orin Johnson said. “And I feel like everybody is on the same page right now. We all have the same goal in mind, and we all want to win, and whether it be offense or defense, we may fight with each other now, but we know everything is going to work out down the road, and we should be pretty good.

“We have a lot of new guys out here,” Johnson added. “A lot of guys that just need reps and need to learn what it means to play college ball. But our motto has been tempo from day one.”

The Lights also conducted an evening practice Sunday night, still in helmets only. The tempo was again fast-paced. MSU-N ran plenty of individual drills, but the offense also got to working on passing situations,
while Northern also worked on the kicking game midway through, and the punting unit got some reps in near the end of the session.

The Lights will continue two-a-day practices all week long, with their first scrimmage set for Saturday morning.