Next stop for the Lights is Dickinson State
MSU-N makes progress in final preseason scrum
By George Ferguson
August 23, 2013

At the beginning of the week, Montana State University-Northern head football coach Mark Samson said his team was going to grind through the second week of two-a-day practices. And that difficult grind ended with Thursday night’s scrimmage at the Havre Middle School football field.

Northern scrimmaged live for about an hour and a half with the team working on offense, defense and special teams. And at the end, the Lights broke the huddle headed for game week as they take on Dickinson State University next Thursday night in Dickinson, N.D.

“I am very pleased with how hard a lot of the kids on this team have worked so far in fall camp,” Samson said. “Tonight, I think you really saw a glimpse of what this team is capable of offensively. I thought our offensive units were really sharp. We did some good things defensively, and our kickers had a nice scrimmage. But what I liked the most was our effort and our intensity. That made it a really good night.”

The offense certainly put on a show early in the scrimmage.

The No. 1 offense scored on three straight drives against the No. 2 defense. The first score came on just the second play of the night as Derek Lear avoided pressure and found redshirt freshman Dylan Woodhall over the middle. Woodhall did the rest, racing 45 yards for the score. And just two plays later, another redshirt freshman, Jake Messerly, took a fly sweep to the right nearly 70 yards for a score. Lear capped off the scoring with a QB keeper for a TD, while Zach McKinley and Jai Johnson both had several big gains throughout the scrum.

After the three scores, the No. 1 defense took the field, and the unit was able to slow down the No. 2 offense. Backup quarterback Travis Dean made a couple of nice runs, and running back Mario Gabbato had several big gains. But the defense also kept the backups out of the endzone, while Tyler Craig had a sack, and Trevor Baum and Tanner Varner had pass breakups.

From there, the team conducted several series of down and distance plays with the No. 1 offense going against the No. 1 defense. The offense seemed to win many of the battles, picking up several first downs, and Lear throwing for some nice completions. Johnson also ran for three different first downs during the series of plays.

The Lights then wrapped up the scrimmage, with plenty of fans in attendance, with new kicker Jordan Rueschoff making several long field goal attempts.

“Everything was clicking for us tonight,” Lear said. “Everything went smooth tonight. The whole offense really knew what they were doing tonight. Last Saturday, we had some hiccups, but tonight I felt like we really executed pretty flawlessly as an offense. And it felt really good.”
And with the offense clicking, and the defense going against one of the top offensive units in the Frontier Conference every day for nearly two weeks, Northern can finally start to look ahead to the season-opener with the Blue Hawks, a team which beat the Lights last fall in Dickinson.

“Tonight was kind of a big hurdle for us,” Lear said. “Now we can really start to polish things up and really focus on getting ready for the first game.

"It’s been a really good camp so far,” he continued. "This entire team, they’ve come to practice every single day wanting to get better. The entire group has really been focused on improving each and every day. I feel like everybody, offense, defense, special teams, everybody has had the same goal from day one, and that’s to improve every single day we’re out here. It’s going really well."

The Lights will have today off to rest and heal up, but will soon get ready for Thursday night’s opener against the Blue Hawks.