Saints run away from Lights
By George Ferguson
September 9, 2013

HELENA — For 15 minutes, the Montana State University-Northern Lights shut out the mighty Carroll College Fighting Saints. For a half, the Lights were locked in a great defensive battle with another great defensive team.

But college football games are a full 60 minutes, and the Saints proved a little too much for Northern in the second act of Saturday’s game at Nelson Stadium.

Northern led No. 12 Carroll 3-0 at the end of the first quarter of Saturday’s Frontier Conference game in Helena, but from there, the Saints scored 31 unanswered points on their way to a 31-3 win in front of a big crowd for what was Carroll’s home opener. It was also the Saints’ 16th straight win over the Lights dating back to November of 2006.

And while the Saints scored a pair of fourth-quarter touchdowns to make the margin much bigger than it really was, Northern battled hard, especially defensively. MSU-N was still very much in the contest down 17-3 late in the third quarter, but an interception of MSU-N junior Travis Dean, who played the entire game in place of injured starter Derek Lear, ended MSU-N’s chance to really make a game of it heading into the fourth quarter.

“I’m not ashamed of our effort whatsoever,” MSU-N head coach Mark Samson said. “We played as hard as we could the entire game. And we did some really good things. I was really proud of our defensive effort. I thought Travis Dean did a good job today. Again, the kids played extremely hard against a very solid football team. Carroll is very good on both sides of the ball, they are big and physical, and I think they wore us down some in the second half.”

The MSU-N defense was the story early on, as the Lights continually stuffed the Carroll running game in the first half. Meanwhile, Dean and the Lights’ offense had the Carroll defense on its heels some in the first 15 minutes. The Lights put together a great second drive, though it stalled out inside the Carroll 20. Junior kicker Jordan Reuschoff broke the ice, though, with a 38-yard field goal to give MSU-N an early 3-0 lead.

But the story of the day wound up being missed opportunities to get points for the Lights’ offense. On its third possession of the game, the Lights again marched down the field and into the second quarter, only to have a couple of false-start penalties back things up. Rueschoff would miss a 44-yard attempt, and on Carroll’s ensuing drive, the Saints finally started to move. Carroll chewed up nearly six minutes of the second-quarter clock, but a sack by Weston Mudge and good stops on Carroll star running back Dustin Rinker forced the Saints to settle for a 38-yard field goal of their own and a 3-3 tie.

However, the Saints didn’t wait until the second half to break that tie. Rinker busted off the longest run of the day, a 27-yard scamper, and Carroll senior Dakota Stonehouse started to heat up in the passing game. And when he found freshman wide receiver Kyle Griffith on a corner route from 17 yards out, the Saints had seemingly wrestled all of Northern’s momentum away, taking a 10-3 lead into halftime.
“Our defense did a really good job of stopping the run for most of the game,” Samson said. “We got some good penetration and I thought we got a pretty good pass rush early on. But Carroll made some nice adjustments, and Stonehouse threw the ball really well. He made some nice reads and caught us on a couple of pass plays. But all-in-all, I thought we got a great defensive effort today, and I think we’ll learn a lot from this game. But that score they got right before halftime was big for them.”

Big, but Northern was nowhere near out of the game. The Lights immediately stopped Carroll’s first two possessions of the second half, but the Saints defense was playing equally as good. And then, late in the third quarter, Stonehouse fired the shot that would put Northern almost too far behind. With MSU-N really bottled up Rinker, Stonehouse looked to the air and found Anthony Clarke streaking up the right side for what would be a 56-yard touchdown and a 17-3 Carroll lead.

“Once you start having success, you start calming down,” Stonehouse said. “And once we got some success on offense, they started to switch things up on defense a bit, too.”

Down 14 points, Northern had to have an answer and the Lights nearly did. With 5:05 left in the third period, Dean calmly marched the Lights on a great drive which was set up by a long kickoff return by Dylan Woodhall. Dean hit Brandt Montelius on a key third-down conversion for 12 yards, while Orin Johnson ripped off a 15-yard run on a direct snap. Later, two big Jai Johnson runs had Northern with a goal-to-goal situation inside the Saints’ 10-yard-line. However, that drive was thwarted by a James Dowgin interception on the goal line, the first of two disheartening picks against the Lights in the second half.

And Carroll made Northern pay for both mistakes. The Saints quickly scored to start the fourth quarter as Rinker broke loose on a 17-yard run to go up 24-3. Then, after a second interception of Dean in the endzone ended another long drive by the Lights, the Saints milked the clock for nearly seven minutes and put the game on ice with an 11-yard TD run by Colter Rood.

“The biggest thing that hurt us today was not scoring when we had those opportunities,” Samson said. “I said coming in, you have to score points against really good teams, and we didn’t do that today. And we had chances. But we made some mistakes in the redzone, and you can’t do that against Carroll. We had some opportunities to put points on the board, we just missed on getting a couple of interceptions of our own, and we had a few too many penalties that were costly. Those things add up, especially against good teams like Carroll, and especially on the road.

“But we’ll learn from those mistakes and be a better football team going forward. I really believe that.”

Offensively, Carroll out-gained Northern 404-287, but most of the Saints’ yardage came in the final 30 minutes. Making his first start in nearly three years, Dean, who has battled injury problems for much of his career, went 18-of-38 for 209 yards and two INT’s. Montelius had five catches for 67 yards, while Orin Johnson added five catches for 55 yards. Lavoricke Williams also had four grabs on the day. Northern was effective running the ball early on, but Carroll wound up allowing the Lights just 78 yards on the ground. Zach McKinley had 37 yards and Jai Johnson added 26 yards.

“Offensively, we did some things well,” Samson said. “I don’t think we ran the ball well enough, and in the second half, their pressure started to get to us because we had to throw more. But I thought Travis did a good job and our receivers made some nice plays today. We have things to work on and I think offensively, we can learn a lot from this game.”

The Saints wound up totaling 192 yards rushing, though the Lights held Rinker to just 68 yards on 18 carries. Rinker rushed for nearly 300 yards in two games against the Lights last season, including 234 yards in a 35-7 Carroll win last October in Helena. Stonehouse had his second straight strong game, going 15-of-23 for 212 yards, two TD’s and no turnovers. He didn’t hurt the Lights with his feet on Saturday, but he made enough big plays to help his team pull away.

“Conference games are always important and Northern always comes to play us tough,” Stonehouse said. “We had a great crowd here today. It’s awesome playing in front of a home crowd. And it’s always good to get a win in the conference.”

Mudge had a breakout day for the MSU-N defense. Up against a huge Carroll offensive line, he totaled five tackles and two sacks. Senior Logan Nathe, a Helena native, totaled a game-high eight tackles, while Josh
Baum had six. Both Josh and Trevor Baum each had key pass deflections, while Trevor also had an outstanding day punting.

The win pushed Carroll to 2-0 on the season with a huge homecoming showdown with Montana Tech looming this Saturday in Helena. Meanwhile, the Lights fell to 1-1 in the Frontier, but will finally make their long-awaited home debut Saturday against Eastern Oregon.

“This was a great test to see where we’re at and where we need to be,” Samson said. “Carroll is a very good football team, and for much of the game, we played pretty darn well. So again, I’m not worried about us at all. I think we’ll learn from this, and we will be a better football team going forward.

“And we’re excited about next week,” he added. “We’re excited to go home and play in front of our fans. We’ll go back to work and get ready to go win a home game against Eastern Oregon.”

Saturday’s game at Blue Pony Stadium against EOU (0-2) kicks off at 1 p.m. The Lights play back-to-back home games with Dickinson State coming in on Sept. 21. The Lights will then be on the road until their rematch with the Saints Oct. 26 in Havre.

**Carroll 31, Northern 3**

Northern 3 0 0 0 — 3

Carroll 0 10 7 14 — 31

**First Quarter**

N — Jordan Rueschhoff 38 field goal

**Second Quarter**

C — Conor Smith 38 field goal, 7:14

C — Kyle Griffith 17 pass from Dakota Stonehouse (Smith kick), 1:02

**Third Quarter**

C — Anthony Clarke 56 pass from Stonehouse (Smith kick), 5:34

**Fourth Quarter**

C — Dustin Rinker 17 run (Smith kick), 13:53

C — Colter Rood 11 run (Smith kick), 1:26

**MSUN CC**

Rushes-yards 22-78 41-192

Passing 209 212

Comp-Att-Int 1 8-38-2 15-23-212
Punts-Avg. 3-40.3 4-42
Penalties-Yards 5-45 3-45

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING — MSUN, McKinley 10-37, J. Johnson 4-32, O. Johnson 3-18, Williams 1-7, Messerly 1- (minus) 7, Dean 3- (minus) 9. CC, Rinker 18-68, Rood 7-52, Pine 6-30, Mayernik 2-26, Stonehouse 8-16.

PASSING — MSUN, Dean, 18-38-2-209. CC, Stonehouse 15-23-0-212.