Lights should revel in Saturday's complete game
From the Fringe...
By George Ferguson
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I know all the football cliches: It’s only one win. It’s a long season. Just have to play ’em one game at a time.

Yes, when you love football as much as I do, and you’ve covered coaches for as long as I have, you’ve certainly heard them all.

But on Saturday afternoon, on a sun-drenched and breezy day at Blue Pony Stadium, it was time to throw cliches’ out the window.

It was time to call just call the Montana State University-Northern Lights’ 45-27 win over the Eastern Oregon Mountaineers what it was ... total domination.

Sure, the cliches might all still be true, but who cares. It had been a long time since the Lights really put it on an opponent the caliber of EOU. It had been a while since Northern raced up and down the field, seemingly doing whatever it wanted to do on offense.

This season, it had already been two full games since the Lights had really lit the light bulbs on the scoreboard up. In fact, Saturday, Northern tripled its point total for the entire season, in just one half.

And it had been a really, really long time since the Lights had thrashed the Mounties, or even came out on top against them. To be exact, it had been six games and three full seasons.

So why not be giddy?

Why not ignore the warnings of getting too up after a win? Why not wait until at least Sunday to start worrying about a rematch with the struggling Dickinson State Blue Hawks?

After six losses to EOU, a 3-7 season a year ago, and some early bumps in the road offensively this season, the Lights deserved to relish in Saturday’s blowout win over the Mounties. The Lights earned the right to look at Saturday’s win as a big one.

“Eastern Oregon is a team we haven’t beaten before, in the time I’ve been here,” said Northern senior quarterback Derek Lear said after returning from a knee injury to throw for three touchdowns. “So this game was pretty personal to me. I kind of took that onto the field today. I think I wanted this game more than some of the other games in my career. And it’s really nice to see us come back from a loss, even though we played pretty well last week, and come back here and play as well as we did today.”

And it wasn’t just getting the EOU monkey off their backs that had the Lights smiling Saturday afternoon.

Northern’s offense had struggled to score points through two games this season, and the Lights really were in need of a breakout performance, especially with the up-start MSU-N defense playing at such a high level to start the season.

And MSU-N got exactly what it wanted Saturday. They finally looked like the Lights of old, throwing deep balls, using speedy receivers to gain big yards and mixing in the power run game behind a dominant offensive line.
At times Saturday, an overmatched Eastern Oregon defense was helpless to stop the Lights, who seemed hell bent on lighting up the Blue Pony Stadium scoreboard.

“Once we got that first score, I think they relaxed out there,” Northern head coach Mark Samson said. “It just felt like the pressure was off them a little bit, and for most of the game, the offense really controlled things and really clicked. It was nice to see us get into a groove and play the way we know we’re capable of playing.”

It was indeed nice to see the Lights making big plays all day Saturday. From long catch-and-runs by Orin Johnson, to the powerful blows delivered by running Zach McKinley, and the highlight reel run where true freshman Mario Gobbato carried 10 EOU defenders for nearly 10 yards, to all the weapons in the MSU-N arsenal which stepped up against the hungry Mounties, it was vintage MSU-N offense. It was balanced, it was explosive and it was fun to watch.

And it’s fun to watch the Lights revel in their latest triumph.

Northern deserves to be excited about a 2-1 start given the Lights got off to a disastrous 0-3 start a season ago. The Lights deserve to savor the moment they created Saturday because it hasn’t happened to them as often as they would have liked over the last 12 months. The Lights deserve to take solace in the fact that they just dominated an opponent who has had their number in recent years, and who will likely be a tough team before season’s end. Yes, EOU has the talent to be that tough team before the fall comes to a close.

No, Northern won’t get too cocky, the Lights won’t overlook the Blue Hawks on homecoming next Saturday. No, this Lights’ team will continue to stay hungry. They will continue to watch film, work hard and strive to get better. Yes, the Lights know they can play even better than they did on Saturday.

But for at least one day, the Lights don’t need to worry about all that. For one day, the Lights can just sit back and savor the moment.