The third week of the Frontier Conference football season sure looked like it was going to be a big one when the schedule came out. And all around the league, last Saturday lived up to the hype.

Offense and big plays were the name of the game in the Frontier last Saturday, including in Havre where the MSU-Northern Lights broke loose for 600 yards and 45 points in a 45-27 win against Eastern Oregon.

Northern’s numbers were staggering. Derek Lear had his first 300-yard passing game of the season and the 13th of his illustrious career. Orin Johnson caught 11 passes and fell just shy of 200 yards receiving. And to add balance to the attack, red-shirt freshman Zach McKinley rushed for 202 yards and two scores. McKinley’s day included seven runs of 15 yards or longer, as well as three runs of 20 or more yards.

The win set the Lights up with a 2-1 start to the season, and they’re in perfect position to really make a go at the Frontier title.

Saturday, Northern will host winless Dickinson State on homecoming at Blue Pony Stadium, and that gives the Lights a golden opportunity to get to 3-1 with their next three games all coming on the road.

Of course, Dickinson won’t be a pushover, and Hank Beisiot’s team will be hungry for a win. However, DSU is really struggling defensively, which is surprising given the talent the Hawks have up front. But last week, DSU gave up 55 points and over 500 yards of offense at home to streaking UM-Western, and with the Northern offense appearing to hit its stride, it could be a long day for the DSU defense Saturday.

However, the Blue Hawks, who have 24 players from Montana on the roster, did hold the Lights to 14 points in the season-opening game back on Aug. 29, a game Northern won 14-0. Of the 24 players born in the Big Sky state, several have seen Blue Pony Stadium before, as Miles City has played Havre four times in the last six seasons. DSU has a host of former Miles City players on its roster including talented starting wide receiver J.T. Keith.

Who’s the QB?

Heading into Saturday’s rematch with the Lights, the Blue Hawks are still platooning quarterbacks. Both Thad Lane (6-2) and Kaler Ray (6-5) have seen nearly equal playing time this season. Lane, who’s listed as the starter on the depth chart, averages 50 yards per game and has thrown just one touchdown in DSU’s three losses. Ray has thrown for 240 yards and three TD’s, but he’s also been picked off three times to just once for Lane. Early in fall camp, it was announced that DSU had as many as six quarterbacks competing for the starting job, and a third QB, 6-5 Brian Cronnelly did see some snaps in last week’s loss to UM-Western.
More Big Backs

Huge rushing numbers got put up all over the Frontier last Saturday.

In UM-Western’s clobbering of DSU, the Bulldogs got to 2-0 on the season on the legs of freshman running back Sam Rutherford, who piled up 245 yards on 31 carries. Rutherford’s performance came on the heels of his 185-yard outburst in his first career game the week before against Southern Oregon.

Not to be outdone, SOU’s Melvin Mason had a night he’ll never forget. Last Saturday, at Big Sky Conference stalwart Sacramento State, Mason carried the rock 20 times for 236 yards in the Raiders’ stunning near-upset of the Hornets. Mason’s heroics, in spite of the Raiders’ 63-56 overtime loss, earned him NAIA Offensive Player of the Week, mainly because he did his damage against an NCAA FCS opponent, on the road.

In a wild shootout, which was supposed to be an easy victory for the Hornets, SOU didn’t let it turn out that way. The Raiders held the lead with just under four minutes left in regulation, but the Hornets scored on a third-down pass as time expired, then were able to score and keep the underdog Raiders out of the endzone in overtime.

Time running out

When the Lights and Blue Hawks meet Saturday at Blue Pony Stadium, it could be the final time the two teams meet for a while. After developing a good non-conference rivalry when Northern first brought football back, then with DSU joining the Frontier, the two teams have seen plenty of each other over the last 14 years.

However, the Blue Hawks are leaving the Frontier to join the North Star Athletic Conference in 2014, and unless the schools decide to renew their rivalry in a non-conference series, Saturday’s game will mark the last time Northern and Dickinson meet in who knows how long.