MSU-Northern Game Day Notebook: Lights maintain great balance at home
By George Ferguson
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Being a balanced offense in football can certainly give opposing defenses fits, and coming into the 2013 season, the Montana State University-Northern Lights looked like a team which had a chance to be that type of team.

Saturday, MSU-N showed that it’s not just balanced on paper, the Lights showed they are for real. In a 49-24 win over Dickinson State Saturday at Blue Pony Stadium, the Lights rushed the ball 36 times for 276 yards. That’s pretty impressive. What’s even more impressive is, MSU-N also threw the ball 19 times for 275 yards. Now that’s balance.

In last week’s dominating win over Eastern Oregon, northern was much the same. Last week, Zach McKinley broke out for a career day, and while he rushed for 138 yards against the Blue Hawks, he certainly had a lot of help.

In all, nine players carried the rock for the Lights Saturday, while the MSU-N passing game was efficient. Derek Lear completed 68 percent of his throws Saturday, while Travis Dean was a sparkling one-for-one with a touchdown. It was also a big day for receivers Lavorick Williams and Brandt Montelius, who combined for 174 yards and two scores. Williams had a particularly good day. The senior transfer averaged a staggering 26 yards per catch, and finally got into the endzone after a couple of near misses the last two weeks.

"We only scored 14 points and never really got going in our game at Dickinson State,” McKinley said. “So coming into this game, we felt like we had a lot to prove. Coach Samson is telling us, we gotta get on a roll offensively. That’s what we’ve been trying to do. And it’s good right now. The offense definitely got it going today, and now we have to try and keep it going."

Firsts

It had been quite some time since one of Northern junior quarterback Travis Dean’s passes had found the endzone. To be exact, Dean hadn’t thrown a TD pass since the 2010 season, thanks in large part to injuries which have sidelined him for a good portion of his Northern career.

And while Dean played at a high level in his start at Carroll College two weeks ago, none of his passes found pay dirt in Nelson Stadium.

That’s one of two reasons why Dean’s 43-yard TD strike to Jake Messerly in the fourth quarter of Saturday’s win over DSU had to feel particularly good. Not only was it his first TD pass in a live game in quite some time, but he was also the one to throw Messerly his first career score. Messerly, a red-shirt freshman wideout from Missoula, has worked his way up the Northern depth chart this season and is playing really well. Saturday, he caught his first carrier TD, and also ran the ball twice for 15 yards.
Taking it Away

The Lights were certainly turnover hungry coming into Saturday's game against DSU. In three games so far in 2013, the MSU-N defense had just one turnover, but the Lights added three Saturday.

Senior linebacker Jordan Van Voast picked off a Kaler Ray pass in the fourth quarter, then just minutes later, Van Voast forced and recovered a Jesse Carney fumble to essentially end any chance DSU had of a comeback.

The Lights also got points off turnovers Saturday. David Arteaga scooped and scored on a first-quarter Carney fumble, while Van Voast's interception, the sixth of his stellar MSU-N career, was followed up by Dean's TD pass to Messerly with 5:33 left in the game.

Quick Strikes

The Lights scored points in a hurry Saturday in their 49-24 win over DSU.

MSU-N had 14 points on the board with less than four minutes gone in the first quarter, and they scored twice in less than two minutes in the second stanza. That’s 28 points in about six minutes of actual football time in the first half.

In all, Northern didn’t grind out many long drives Saturday, instead, the Lights beat Dickinson with the big play. McKinley had three runs of 20 yards or longer. Northern had a 71-yard pass play, and the Lights’ longest drive of the day was just nine plays and 66 yards, only chewing up about 4:30 of clock time. DSU had the longest drive of the day, covering 11 plays and 86 yards.