In back-to-back weeks against nationally-ranked opponents, on the road, the Montana State University-Northern football team came up a few plays short of a sweep.

One week after knocking off then No. 15 UM-Western in Dillon, the No. 19 Lights found themselves in a dogfight with No. 16 Rocky Mountain College Saturday at Herb Klindt Field in Billings. But 10 unanswered points by the Battlin’ Bears in the fourth quarter proved too much for the Lights to overcome as Rocky won a defensive battle 23-13.

The loss dropped Northern to 4-2 on the season, while Rocky improved to 5-1 and took over sole possession of first place in the Frontier Conference standings.

And while Northern’s defense proved tough once again, and the Lights rushed for 100 more yards than RMC, mistakes caused the Lights to leave Billings without a win for the third straight season.

“Turnovers really hurt us,” Northern head coach Mark Samson said. “In a game like that, on the road, you can’t afford those mistakes and we gave them three and we didn’t get any back. That was pretty much the different in the game.”

Rocky picked off Northern quarterback Derek Lear three times Saturday, but the last INT proved most costly. The Bears had just gone ahead 16-13 on a Ryan Steska 20-yard FG with 10:53 left in the game. And just several plays later, RMC’s Travis Bertelsen intercepted Lear in MSU-N territory, and that turned out to be the Lights’ undoing. The Bears made the Lights pay for the interception with Pete Anderson’s 8-yard touchdown run with seven minutes left in the game, and Northern couldn’t recover in the short amount of time it had left.

“We just didn’t have a good day offensively,” Samson said. “I thought we ran the ball pretty effectively, but we shot ourselves in the foot one too many times. I also thought we just weren’t as emotionally sharp as we were against Western. I thought we were pretty flat emotionally.”

MSU-N did get off to a reasonable start, as the Lights took a 7-0 lead on a 3-yard TD run by Lear late in the first quarter. But the Bears answered on their ensuing possession as Bryce Baker hooked up with MacKenzie McGrath on a 63-yard TD pass, but the Bears missed the PAT and the Lights led 7-6 at the end of the first quarter.

Northern’s defense, which held RMC to just 358 yards of offense, and only 114 yards rushing, played well for much of the game, but the Bears put together a go-ahead drive late in the second quarter and led 13-7 at intermission.

MSU-N answered the call and took the lead however, on a great drive in the third quarter. The drive ended with a short, Jai Johnson TD run, but the PAT was blocked and the game was tied heading into the final period, before Rocky made its late charge.

In the defensive battle, the Lights were held 100 yards below their season output, as Northern gained 350 yards of offense. MSU-N did rush for over 200 for the fourth straight game, with Johnson earning a career-high 77 yards. Zach McKinley was held well below his season average, but Lear did rush for 76 yards on 12 carries. However, he struggled in the passing game, going 11-of-33 for only 118 yards, with three INT’s and no touchdowns.
The MSU-N defense, limited the Rocky duo of Baker to Andre McCollough to just 40 yards, but a couple of timely plays by the RMC offense turned out to be enough. Josh Baum totaled 12 tackles for MSU-N as did Tyler Craig, who also had a sack. Kaimi Kanehailua had nine stops and a sack as well.

Now, Northern heads into its bye week alone in third place in the Frontier. Rocky has a half game lead on Carroll College, while the Lights have a half game lead on Southern Oregon and UM-Western. Northern travels to SOU on Oct. 19.

"We just have to put this one behind us," Samson said. "It’s disappointing because we just didn’t play well. It wasn’t a pretty game at all by either team. But we just have to move on. We’ll use the bye to get healthy and that starting getting ready for a very good Southern Oregon team."

**Rocky 23, Lights 13**  
**MSU Northern 7 0 6 0 -- 13**  
**Rocky Mountain 6 7 0 10 -- 23**

**First quarter**
- **MSU-N** -- Derek Lear 3 run (Jordan Rueschhoff kick), 1:44
- **RMC** -- MacKenzie McGrath 63 pass from Bryce Baker (kick failed), 0:14

**Second quarter**
- **RMC** -- Baker 4 run (Ryan Steska kick), 5:14

**Third quarter**
- **MSU-N** -- Jai Johnson 4 run (kick blocked), 4:28

**Fourth quarter**
- **RMC** -- Steska 20 FG, 10:53
- **RMC** -- Pete Anderson 8 run (Steska kick), 7:06

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**Individual Statistics**


**PASSING** -- Northern: Derek Lear 11-33-3, 118. Rocky: Bryce Baker 22-32-0, 244.