Remember When... A day Samson will never forget

Seven years ago, Northern Offensive Coordinator Kyle Samson quarterbacked the Lights to the biggest win in school history, a 10-3 victory over mighty Carroll College

By George Ferguson
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October 28, 2006 is a day that will live in infamy. It's a day that will forever be special to the Montana State University-Northern football program, the entire Northern campus, Lights' fans and the community of Havre.

It's infamous because on that day, Northern secured its signature win, a 10-3 victory over mighty Carroll College, in front of the largest college football crowd in the history of Blue Pony Stadium.

To say Northern's win was an upset that day was fair. After all, the Fighting Saints were on a 30-plus game winning streak, were the defending NAIA national champions, they were ranked No. 1 in the NAIA that week, they had the top-ranked defense in the country and Northern hadn't beaten Carroll since football was re-introduced in Havre.

But, on the flip side to all of that, what might get lost in the lore of that day was the fact that the Lights were very, very good too. The 2006 season was the third of the Mark Samson era, and that year was the culmination of an original recruiting class which included some of the most talented players the Lights have ever had on one team. The Lights had a high-octane spread offense, and after the win over Carroll, a defense which finished ranked first in the NAIA. Northern also nearly knocked off the Saints a month earlier in Helena, and had been dismantling Frontier teams at a record pace prior to Oct. 26.

And the Lights had Kyle Samson too. Part of the 2004 class, Samson followed his father to Northern after playing one year at the University of Montana. Originally moved to receiver as a Grizzly, Samson etched his name into Griz quarterback lore by engineering a win over NCAA Division I foe Idaho when he was called into duty after Grizzly QB's Craig Ochs and Jeff Disney couldn't play that day in Missoula.

But Samson left all that behind and chose to be the Lights' quarterback under his father. And while he shined right away, the Lights' building process took time. Northern took a big step forward by going 5-5 in 2005, with Samson earning Frontier First-Team All-Conference honors and All-American honors to boot.

And that remarkable season was followed up the dream 2006 year, a year which saw Northern make its only playoff appearance and come within an upset loss at Eastern Oregon (A game in which Samson couldn't go due to injury) from capturing the Frontier title.

But as great as the 2006 season was, and it was, and still is the most successful in Northern history, it was that gloomy, warm and windy day in October, inside an electric Blue Pony Stadium, against the unbeatable Carroll College Fighting Saints which everyone will remember.

That day was a day no one will ever forget, and Kyle Samson, now the Lights' offensive coordinator, will never forget it either. It was a day of defense, it was a gut-wrenching 60 minutes of grind-it-out football, in which one touchdown was enough, and the MSU-N defense put together the most dominating day in perhaps all of Frontier football history. But it was also one in which Northern could never have won without
its quarterback and emotional leader. Samson made big plays all day against a Carroll defense which was dominating in its own right. And though secretly hobbled by a bad ankle, it was a day when Samson shined brightest.

And simply put, it's one of the most emotional and heart-felt days of Kyle Samson's football career.

*Here’s five questions with Kyle Samson nearly seven years to the day that the Lights beat Carroll on that magical day in 2006, and as Northern prepares to face the mighty Saints Saturday afternoon in Havre.*

**HDN:** Where does that day, that win over the Saints rank in your football career?

**Samson:** "It's definitely up there as one of the top two moments in my playing career. Number one would have to be winning the state championship as a senior in high school for (Helena) Capital but it would be a close second in my career.

**HDN:** You guys had played Carroll close early in the season, and the Saints were your only loss to that point. How confident were you going into that game?

**Samson:** "I think we were very confident because we had played them so close earlier in the year and we knew that we were playing really well at home and we knew we were going to have a tremendous crowd behind us. The crowd we had that day was by far the most amazing thing I have ever seen at Blue Pony Stadium. Walking out of the locker room an hour before the game even started and seeing the stadium completely full was one of the coolest things that I have seen here in Havre."

**HDN:** It was a dramatic game. What was the key moment for you?

**Samson:** "In my memory, I would say the key moment was when Dilan Saisbury made a great interception late in the third quarter when the game was tied 3-3 and then we were able to drive the ball down and Donny Saisbury scored a touchdown on third- and-goal from the one-yard-line."

**HDN:** Describe the feeling of all you guys accomplished in that 60 minutes that day. You beat the top-ranked team in the country, they had a long winning streak going and it was, and still is the seminole win in Northern football history.

Samson: " It was definitely a great feeling of pride and accomplishment. I would say it was more of a culmination of three years of hard work and sacrifice to get us to the point where we could compete and actually believe we could beat a team as great as Carroll College. When my dad first got the job in 2004, I don't think anybody ever thought that Northern would ever be able to have a chance to beat Carroll. It was just a great group of guys that really bought in to what my dad was teaching us and we put it all together that year and really got the chance to prove a lot of people wrong by putting Northern football on the map with a signature win like that, against, in my mind, the greatest program in the history of NAIA Football."

**HDN:** Looking back, just how good was that 2006 Northern team and what did that day, season mean to you personally?

**Samson:** "The 2006 team will always hold a special place in my heart, especially being able to play for my father and play with my brother Marc and a couple of my best friends like Jake Eldridge, Josh Glahn and Donny Saisbury. We all came to Northern at the same time with my dad and went through an extremely tough year in 2004 and then continued to get better in 2005 and then really put it all together in 2006. We had some great individual talent on that team but I think the reason that we were successful is that we had great leadership on that team and everyone played for each other and truly "bought in" to being a team. It was one of the toughest seasons for me personally because I was injured pretty much the whole season and wasn't able to run our offense like I wanted to. I truly believe that we were great that year because of the way our offensive line played all year and most importantly, we had a tremendous defense that I would say is one of the best that this league has ever seen. I will always remember that year and always be thankful to all of my teammates and coaches for all the hard work and sacrifice that they gave to this program and to finish my senior year with a great season is something that I will always remember."