Since Mark Samson took over as head coach of the Montana State University-Northern football program in 2004, the Lights have played five night games at Blue Pony Stadium. And in four of those, Northern didn't lose.

And that's why the Lights should be glad they welcome in Montana Tech on Saturday night. Northern has lost three straight games, and a Frontier Conference night game might be just what the Lights need to stop the skid.

Saturday night's game, like many of MSU-N's past night games, is a result of the Havre High football team hosting a Class A playoff game. The Blue Ponies will host Miles City at 12 p.m. Saturday in what will be part of an exciting doubleheader at Blue Pony Stadium. The Lights and Tech will kick off at 6:30 p.m.

And Tech is part of the list of teams the Lights have had success against in the dark. In 2008, Northern closed out the regular season with a thrashing of the Orediggers on a Friday night at Blue Pony Stadium. Northern has also beaten Rocky Mountain College three times in Havre in night games, while the Lights are also 1-0 in night games this season. MSU-N took care of Dickinson State 14-0 on a Thursday night back in August.

Northern will also look to atone for a rare night-game loss at home. MSU-N did fall to Carroll College in a Saturday night contest back in August of 2012, though that game never really got dark until the fourth quarter. MSU-N was 0-2 last season in games played after 6 p.m. The Lights lost their regular season finale to RMC at Daylis Stadium in Billings last November. That game was moved to a night game due to poor travel conditions between Havre and Billings.

But back to the bright lights of Blue Pony Stadium, the Lights have always seemed to shine bright. And they'll want to again. Northern is in the middle of a three-game home stand to close out the regular season, and the Lights really want to get back on track.

Last Saturday's 42-14 loss to Carroll College likely ended MSU-N's chances at an NAIA playoff berth, but there's still plenty at stake over the next three weeks. MSU-N not only has a chance to go 6-4 with two wins to finish off the season, but the Lights can make up for two straight losses to Tech on Saturday night, then take down any chance Rocky has at a playoff berth when Northern hosts the Bears on the final day of the regular season, which is Nov. 16.

But more so than any type of revenge, Saturday night's game will be about MSU-N just getting back to playing well. Northern was on top of the world after a Sept. 28 triumph at then No. 15 UM-Western. But since that time, the Lights have slipped on both sides of the ball. Turnovers have plagued the Lights in losses at Rocky and Southern Oregon, as well as last week's setback against Carroll. In those three games, the Lights have thrown nine interceptions, while only averaging 18 points per contest. On the other side of
the coin, the Lights have only gotten one turnover in that same stretch, and in their last two losses, have
given up an average of 500 total yards per game.

So, with a struggling Montana Tech squad, which has won just once in its last six games coming into
Saturday night's bout, the bright lights of Blue Pony Stadium, and the chilly night air of fall in Havre could
be the exact remedy the Lights need to right the ship. Some of Northern's most historic wins have come on
nights just like that in Havre, and MSU-N will be doing everything it can to make sure it happens again on
Saturday night.

In a Pit

It's hard to understand just how Montana Tech could have slipped so far so fast. At this time a season ago,
the Orediggers were winding their way through a magical season which ended with a Frontier co-
championship and a coveted NAIA playoff berth. But one year later, Tech has just two wins, and those have
come against sub. 500 clubs Eastern Oregon and Dickinson State.

There's two glaring differences between the 2012 Orediggers, and this year's version. First is quarterback
play. In 2012, Tech senior QB Nick Baker was one of the most efficient QB's in the NAIA. He threw for 28
touchdowns against only 14 interceptions, and his ability to make plays really opened things up for star
running back Pat Hansen. However, this season, the Diggers' have started three different QB's, they've
suffered injuries at the position, and combined, Herman Tapley, Brian Schwartzkopf and Dawson Reardon
have just 10 TD passes on the season, while they have combined to throw nine picks.

On the defensive side of the ball, Tech has slipped too, even with returning All-Conference performers on
the line and at linebacker. Tech is still a top four defense in the Frontier, but the Diggers' are averaging
over 100 more yards per game allowed than they did a season ago, and the Tech defense hasn't forced
nearly as many takeaways. Tech was plus six in turnover margin a season ago, but the Diggers' are a
disappointing minus seven this season.

So, with inconsistency at the quarterback position, and a less impactful defense, it's not hard to see why
the Orediggers have had a hard time getting over the hump in 2013.

Star Watch

The month of October is in the books, and there aren't many league games left on the slate. But some
Frontier stars are putting themselves into the history books this season.

SOU quarterback Austin Dodge leads the NAIA in total offense with 3,406 totals yards. He's also tops in the
country with 3,382 PASSING yards and an astounding 41 touchdowns. Dodge leads the NAIA in passer
rating as well. He has attempted a staggering 257 passes and has thrown just six INT's all season. His 41
TD's are 16 more than the second-best QB in the country. RMC QB Bryce Baker continues to have a fine
season as well. Baker is currently seventh in the NAIA in passing and ninth in total offense.

Carroll's Dustin Rinker has really heated up in recent weeks too. The junior running back averages 133
yards per game, which is first in the Frontier and seventh in country. After such a strong start, Western's
Sam Rutherford has slipped to 19th in the country in rushing, but is still averaging 116 yards per outing.
Tech's Pat Hansen (105 ypg) and Northern's Zach McKinley (97 ypg) are 25th and 26th, respectively in the
NAIA. The Frontier has three of the top 10 receivers in the country, with SOU's Dylan Young first and
teammate Ryan Retzlaff third. Rocky's Andre McCullough is seventh.

On the defensive side of the ball, Eastern Oregon's Gary Posten is fourth in the NAIA with 98 total tackles,
while Western's Casey Griffith is fifth with 89. Western defensive end Phil Selin is fifth in the NAIA with
eight sacks, while Carroll safety James Dowgin is fifth in the country with five interceptions.

Forfeit means Huge

Showdown

The NAIA did enforce Rocky Mountain College's self-reported violation of having played an ineligible player
in the Battlin' Bears Aug. 31 game at Southern Oregon. Originally, the Bears beat the Raiders, but the
game became a forfeit as decided by the NAIA.
Interestingly, SOU was also granted a win, which has changed the landscape of the conference standings completely. The Raiders are now tied with Carroll for first place in the Frontier heading into Saturday's battle in Helena.

The game between the No. 5 Saints and No. 20 Raiders could decide the Frontier title because there is no rematch. SOU beat the Saints 52-49 in a wild game last year in Ashland, Ore., and the win was part of a six-game winning streak which lifted SOU to the Frontier title.

Now the Raiders are on a similar streak, having won five straight since a Sept. 14 loss at Big Sky Conference stalwart Sacramento State. In that stretch, SOU has scored at least 50 points or more in every game, has scored 60 once and 70 once, and the Raiders are averaging close to 600 yards of total offense.

On the other end though is Carroll. This will be SOU's first trip to Nelson Stadium since joining the Frontier, and the Saints will be jacked up for the contest. Carroll returns the bulk of its roster from last year's team, and the sting of that loss to SOU, which kept the Saints out of the playoffs still lingers. Carroll also has a much more effective defense in 2013, and Dodge, SOU's record-setting quarterback, will certainly be put to the test, maybe even more so than he was against the FCS Hornets back in September.

So, if the 2012 Carroll-SOU battle was an instant classic, with all the side stories and with everything at stake in Helena, Saturday's game has the makings of an epic thriller.