One more time for MSU-N seniors
Northern will say goodbye to a group of seniors who've left their mark on the program
By Daniel Horton
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Every season, the Montana State University-Northern football program welcomes in a new recruiting class filled with freshman standouts and new transfers. But at the end of every season, the Lights must also say goodbye to a talented group of seniors playing in their final game in a Lights’ uniform.

Saturday afternoon, when MSU-N hosts Rocky Mountain College at Blue Pony Stadium in Havre, the Lights will honor nine seniors exiting the program. This year's seniors include defensive back Josh Baum, defensive back Tanner Varner, linebacker David Arteaga, linebacker Jordan Van Voast, defensive tackle Logan Nathe, wide receiver Brandt Montelius, offensive lineman Alex Cummings, wide receiver and return specialist Orin Johnson, and quarterback Derek Lear. This group of graduating seniors has been as crucial to the program's success as any group in recent history, as will be just as difficult to replace.

“The biggest thing is performance,” MSU-N head coach Mark Samson said. “We were looking through this list of seniors and all of these guys have been here for multiple years and have started for us for multiple years. They have all been good players, a lot of them have been All-Conference, and I think all of them will be graduating with their degree next semester. They have been an ideal group of seniors, and it really has been one of our better groups of seniors from top to bottom in terms of playing time, awards, and academics.”

And those players will be greatly missed on both sides of the ball come next season.

Baum was a three-year starter after transferring to Northern and has totaled 194 tackles, including 68 this season. Baum was also named All-Conference in 2012. Varner is another talented defensive back, and also earned All-Conference honors two years ago. And a four-year starter, Varner was also a three-year Academic All-Conference honoree, a 2013 Academic All-American, and has racked up 151 tackles while leading the team in total passes defended. Nathe has also been key player on the defensive line for the Lights, while Arteaga and Van Voast have also been key in the line backing core.

Nathe was a two-year starter for MSU-N and Samson has been more than pleased with his production as an undersized body at 6-1 230 pounds. A Havre native and former Blue Pony, Van Voast has been in the top three in total tackles each of his four years starting as an outside linebacker. Van Voast has totaled 281 tackles and was an All-Conference selection. Arteaga transferred to Northern and started each of his two seasons in Havre. Arteaga has also totaled 115 tackles with 56 of those so far this season.

On offense, Cummings has been a factor for five years at Northern, and is the ideal utility player. As a three-year starter Cummings has also played every position on the offensive line except for center, and has always been a crutch for the team to lean on whenever need be.
“These kids have gotten some things done over the years,” Samson said. “And I have really enjoyed this group. I do have some issues though, mainly because I wish we could have won a few more games for these guys, especially this year. But it is what it is, and I am hoping the kids can rally this weekend and end the season with a win. It would be nice to send these guys out with a win.”

But three of the biggest holes left to fill will come with the exit of Lear, the four-year starting quarterback, and two of his favorite targets in Johnson and Montelius.

Lear has his name on 12 different school passing records. He grew into one of the biggest names in the Frontier Conference and has passed for more than 8,300 yards and rushed for more than 1,200 yards. Lear also passed for 73 scores, while rushing for another six in his collegiate career, helping him grab All-Conference honors after both his sophomore and junior seasons.

And as a two-year starter with Lear, Montelius has benefited from the play of Lear. Montelius was with the MSU-N program for five years, but really emerged the last two. This season, Montelius is second on the team in receptions, yards, and touchdowns. Johnson has also benefited from the play of Lear and the high-octane Northern offense. Johnson is a four-year starter for the Lights and holds the career record for receptions, and is second all-time in career touchdowns and receiving yards. Johnson also holds four records in the punt return game including longest return, average return yards per game, average return yards per season, and return yards in a career. He will also go down as one of the most dynamic and versatile offensive weapons MSU-N has ever had.

“I think losing kids like this is just one of those things you deal with every year,” Samson said. “The goal is to at least get somebody as good as the kid that you have leaving, but that is hard to do sometimes. And with players like Orin Johnson, I have said this for years now, but he is one of the most competitive kids I have ever coached in 32 years of football and I hope the other coaches finally realize that this year and give him some All-Conference recognition. I all though, this group will really be missed.”

The Lights will play their final game of the season, while also saying goodbye to their seniors on Saturday at Blue Pony Stadium. The Lights will host RMC at noon.