Over the hump: Lights beat Montana Tech

By George Ferguson

September 5th was a long time ago. But for the Montana State University-Northern football team it must have seemed like an eternity. That was the last time the Lights felt the thrill of victory, but all that changed on Saturday at Blue Pony Stadium.

In a wild Frontier Conference battle, the Lights scored a go-ahead touchdown on a Travis Dean to Jake Messerly 32-yard pass with two minutes left, then watched as Tech kicker Matt Berg missed a short field goal in the waning seconds, lifting Northern to a much-needed 37-34 victory on a sun-splashed day in Havre.

The win avenged the Lights’ season-opening loss to the Ore-diggers, and snapped a four-game skid.

"It’s a testament to how hard these kids have kept working, and how hard they’ve kept fighting," said Northern interim head coach Jake Eldridge. "I'm very proud of them, and they deserve this."

The Lights started off what was a crazy game with a bang. On their first place from scrimmage, Zach McKinley went off for 40 yards, and the first of three rushing touchdowns for the sophomore in the first half. However, the PAT was blocked and Tech returned it nearly 90 yards for a safety. But, behind the running of McKinley, Northern was able to build a 23-9 lead late in the opening half.

However, things unraveled from there. Tech scored twice in the final three minutes of the half, cutting the Lights' lead to 23-21 at the break. In all, the Diggers, scored four straight times in the second and third quarters, and had built up a 34-23 lead, a lead that would last deep into the fourth quarter. But after a series of turnovers, huge stops by the MSU-N defense, and a few strange calls, the Lights found themselves with the ball back with just over five minutes to go. And a couple of plays later, Dean hot Messerly with a beautiful ball right down the middle of the field for what was the game-winning score.

The Diggers, who suffered their fifth straight loss, did drive all the way down to the MSU-N 9-yard-line, but the Lights held on three straight plays, including a big pass breakup in the endzone. Then, after a bad snap, Berg missed the FG wide right that would have sent the game into overtime.

McKinley carried the load offensively for the Lights, as he rushed for 190 yards, but Tech out-gained the normally potent MSU-N offense, 470-384. However, the Lights got three turnovers and blocked a pair of PAT’s, while also coming up with some crucial stops on defense in the fourth quarter.

Northern returns to the road to face Eastern Oregon this Saturday.

For full coverage of Saturday's game, see Monday's Havre Daily News.