Imagine being a Montana State University-Northern football player seven days ago in Caldwell, Idaho.

You have lost three straight games. You had already been through some heartbreaking times, and the season hadn’t even started yet. Yet, you helped your team claw back from 28 points down and were in position to win your first game in the Frontier Conference this season.

And then, with one second left on the clock, you don’t.

Imagine the feeling of that heartache, of coming so close to winning a thrilling game, only to have disappointment rear its ugly head for a fourth straight week. And then you realize, you’re going to wake up on Monday morning, and you have to start all over again.

For the Lights, who have been so close, so many times already this season, only to come up empty handed, that feeling last Monday must have been daunting, if not overwhelming.

Yet, they climbed right back on the horse, through soreness and injuries and bitter disappointment, and got back to work, preparing to host Montana Tech, a team they desperately wanted to beat.

Now imagine you’re that same Northern football player, in the middle of Saturday’s battle with the Orediggers at Blue Pony Stadium. Things are rolling. You are up 23-9 and you are playing really well. Your team, in front of your home fans, is on the verge of finally climbing that victory mountain.

But, in the third quarter, there you are. Tech has scored four touchdowns without an answer. You’re down by 11 points and time, precious time is ticking away. You ask yourself, can this really be happening again? Didn’t this just happen to us last week?

I didn’t ask any of the Lights if those thoughts were going through their heads following Saturday’s 37-34 win over the Orediggers. But, if there were any doubts, at any time during Saturday’s game, a win the Lights needed and deserved, it sure didn’t show.

Instead, Northern stayed banded together, as brothers, and went out and finished the job they came to do.

When the Lights needed a defensive stop, in fact, they needed about six of them in the second half to make the comeback possible, they found a way to get it. At times like that, it’s pretty hard to execute if you have doubts, or that sick feeling in the pit of your stomach.

Offensively, when the Lights absolutely, unequivocally needed touchdowns, or first downs, they got them. Travis Dean only completed 13 passes Saturday, but two of them in the second half, a touchdown pass to Trevor Baum in the third quarter, and the game-winner to Jake Messerly in the fourth, were two of the biggest throws of his career.

No, Northern executed on offense when it needed to most, and if there were doubts, or a lack of confidence, I doubt the Lights would have executed all those offensive plays they needed in order to complete the comeback.

Now, I will admit, I did see several Lights who were unable to watch as Matt Berg lined up for a game-tying field goal attempt in the final seconds of Saturday’s game. But that wasn’t about doubt or resignation, it
was about wanting to win so badly, and knowing they had done enough to get a win, and not wanting to watch if it was going to be taken away at the end, for the second week in a row.

No, I don’t think for one second the Lights doubted themselves or each other on Saturday. When you’re faced with as much adversity as the Lights were on Saturday, and all season for that matter, there’s no way they could have climbed that mountain with doubts and fear.

Instead, Northern interim head coach Jake Eldridge, as well as Messerly saw it another way, and it best summed up how the Lights got the job done against the Orediggers, even when things looked bleak yet again.

“We decided to really come together and play this game as a family. No worrying about the individual stuff,” Messerly said. “We trust each other as a family, and we were able to pull out the win.

“They continue to believe, and you know, they never quit. They continue to believe in each other, and they ended up getting the W at the end of the day,” Eldridge said.

Yes, Northern does believe. It would be easy to think the Lights wouldn’t having gone well over a month without a win. It would be easy for the Lights to give up, to just go away for the season. Personally, I’ve seen other football teams in Northern’s shoes do that. But clearly, that’s not these Lights.

And it was never more evident than Saturday. When things went from good, to bad, to worse, for at least a while, the true character of the 2014 Lights shined bright. These Lights weren’t giving up the fight against Tech. They didn’t give up the fight last Saturday in Idaho, and though it’s just their second win of 2014, there’s no way they are giving up the fight the rest of the way.

It’s clear from what the Lights achieved Saturday in Blue Pony Stadium, their last four opponents should be on notice. In 2014, there’s absolutely no quit in the Northern football program.

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