Northern coaching search taking shape
It won't be long before MSU-N announces its next football coach
By George Ferguson
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The next head coach of the Montana State University-Northern football team is something that's been on the minds of Lights' fans, players, and the entire community for some time now. And especially since the 2014 Frontier Conference season ended last month.

And while the name of the man who will lead the Lights next hasn’t been determined, according to Northern Athletic Director Christian Oberquell, the process to find the next leader of the Lights has gone well, and it won’t be long before the school has their next head coach.

“We’ve had 61 applicants as of today (Friday),” Oberquell said recently. “And we’ve currently been doing phone interviews, and we’ll be wrapping those up by the beginning of this week. I can say, we’ve had some really good candidates apply, and the whole process has gone really well.”

Northern, which went 3-7 this past season, was under the guidance of defensive coordinator Jake Eldridge. He was asked to head the team after veteran head coach Mark Samson resigned just after training camp started in August. Samson had been the Lights’ leader for 11 seasons, and is one of just two men to coach the Lights since the school re-instated football some 16 years ago. The late Walt Currie was Northern’s first head coach in the modern era of football on the MSU-N campus.

Eldridge, who still wears the tag of interim head coach, has applied for the position.

But, while there are still plenty of things that have to happen before a full-time head coach is named, the time frame for those things is drawing closer according to Oberquell.

“We’re going to narrow it down to three, four potential candidates at the most,” Oberquell said. “Hopefully, we’ll have that done by the end of this week. So we’re looking at having those people here, on campus the week of the (Dec.) 15th-19th. That’s when we’ll do our in-person interviews, and we’ll have a forum for the public to attend for each candidate. We’ll try to do that late in the afternoon, so we give members of the community an opportunity to get here and be a part of it. We want the community to be involved with those forums as much as possible.”

And after that, it will be time for MSU-N to make a big decision. The decision on who is best to lead Northern’s football future. The Lights should return a talented group of players for next season, including First-Team All-Conference running back Zach McKinley, who broke several single-season rushing records this past season, as well as All-Conference defensive end Tyler Craig, who led the league in sacks, and explosive wide receiver Jake Messerly, among others.
“My hope is, to have this done, and have someone hired before the holidays,” Oberquell said. “But as soon as we know who we’re bringing to campus, we’ll announce those names, and a schedule of when each of them will be here, and we’ll go from there.”

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