Lights ink 22 on signing day
By George Ferguson
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National signing day is always a big day for the Montana State University-Northern football program, just as it is for every college football program at every level around the country.

But Wednesday was an especially big day on the campus of MSU-Northern, where new head coach Aaron Christensen announced his first recruiting class at Northern. Christensen announced 22 signees Wednesday, and while he was excited about the group, he admitted that recruiting had been a challenge given the time he had to work with. Christensen was hired Dec. 25, and arrived in Havre in early January. That left a little over a month to secure his first recruiting class as Lights’ head coach.

“We were a little bit late coming to the table,” Christensen said Wednesday night. “But that only made us work harder to get out there and get the kids we wanted. When I got here, the number one priority was to get the players we already had together, and get them going in the direction we wanted to go. Then, obviously, number two was to get out and get recruiting. It went by really fast, but I think we did a really good job with those two things and I’m really pleased with how this first group of recruits came together.”

As for the 2015 class, the Lights signed three transfers and 19 high school seniors. Eleven of the seniors hail from the state of Montana, while Northern also signed players from Washington, Arizona and California.

nd the class turned out balanced. Christensen said his main priorities were to address immediate needs on the offensive and defensive lines, as well as at linebacker. He also said wide receiver was a point of emphasis. And while he feels those needs were filled, he also said Northern will continue recruiting, and address more needs at defensive back.

“We with this group, we really focused on the interior, both the offensive and defensive lines and linebackers,” Christensen said. “We felt we needed to build some depth there, and a little more depth at wide receiver. So this group of guys really addresses those needs and we’re very excited about the kids who are coming in.”

Of the transfers, Northern signed quarterback Herman Smith from NCAA Division II national champion Colorado State University-Pueblo. The 6-5 Smith hails from Las Vegas, Nevada, where he was an All-State signal caller, and he will bring immediate competition to Northern’s stable of QBs, which is really true sophomore Jess Krahn, who started the last four games of Northern’s 2014 campaign. Smith is currently already enrolled at Northern and will compete in spring ball next month.

The rest of Northern’s transfers include athletic tight end Brandon Stoutmeyer, who comes to MSU-N from Hamline University in Minnesota. The 6-3 Stoutmeyer is originally from Arizona, and should help replace two-time All-Conference performer John Jansen. Josh Loutzenhiser, originally from Sand Point, Idaho, is one of four defensive linemen who signed on Wednesday. He’s transferring to MSU-N from South Virginia University. Loutzenhiser started his career as a walk-on at the University of Idaho.
Northern also landed 11 preps from the Treasure State, something Christensen said is very vital to the growth of the program. Among the prospects is Malta’s Qintan Boos, who is a two-time Class B All-State running back and linebacker, as well as an alternate in the 2015 Montana East-West Shrine Game. Boos is slated to play linebacker at Northern.

Linebacker was a big need filled by in-state players. Northern also inked Missoula Big Sky Western AA All-Conference linebacker Travis Crawford, as well as Hellgate linebacker Jonathan Gragg. Eastern A All-Conference linebacker Alex Wager of Laurel is also signed to the Lights, as is Class C All-Stater Paxton Maki of Belt and Big Timber linebacker Lee Hughes.

On the offensive line, Northern landed Casey Cleveland, an Eastern AA All-Conference linemen from Class AA runner-up CMR High in Great Falls, as well as Three Fork’s Trenton Woodward and Hellgate’s Ryan Handley. The Missoula area has been a fertile recruiting ground for Northern in recent years, and the Lights picked up a solid defensive line prospect in Big Sky’s Trevor Frandsen. Northern also inked Lambert fullback Kyle Watson, another Class C All-State selection.

Northern picked up plenty of help from out of state as well.

On the offensive line, MSU-N added the massive Dylan Schmidt, a 6-4, 275-pounder out of Lakeside High School in Washington. Schmidt was an All-League pick his senior season. On the defensive line, Northern inked Salesi Koloamatangi out of Hamilton High in Arizona, as well as Elijah Dennison from Enumclaw, Washington.

Northern also grabbed two stellar wide receiver prospects from neighboring states. Dauntarious Williams, a 6-3 speedster from Silver Valley High School in Yermo, California, and Nash Soliman, a prototype slot receiver from Golden Valley High in Santa Clarita, California, were both great pickups for the Lights.

Washington and Arizona were good for the Lights again, too. Northern signed All-League linebacker Tovati Gasetoto Jr., from Washington High in Tacoma, as well as cornerback Treajaun Foard from Basha High in Chandler, Arizona. Rounding out the class is quarterback Nate Loutzenhiser from Sand Point, Idaho, the younger brother of Josh, the transfer from South Virginia.

“With this group, we were looking for guys who were hard workers, who were going to be dedicated to being here for 4-5 years,” Christensen said. “And guys who could come in and compete for us right away. And I think we found that with this group. This is a really great group of kids, it’s a great mix of in-state and out-of-state guys, and we’re really excited about the entire group.”

And though signing day is the end of the line for the 22 players Northern signed Saturday, at the NAIA level, the recruiting process goes on. Christensen said Northern will continue to look for more players to add depth and impact to Northern’s roster, and from there, the Lights will move forward toward spring ball, which will start after MSU-N’s spring break next month.

“I’m really excited about this group,” Christensen said. “I feel like we got a lot of things we were looking for. So that’s exciting. And we’re not done. We’re going to stay on it and see if we can’t address a few more needs.”

**MSU-N Football Class of 2015**

**Transfers**
Herman Smith, QB, 6-5, 215, Colorado State-Pueblo, Victor Valley CC
Brandon Stoutmeyer, TE, 6-3, 210, Hamline University
Josh Loutzenhiser, DL, 6-1, 255, South Virginia University

**High School Signees**
Nash Soliman, WR 5-8, 160, Golden Valley High School, California
Casey Cleveland, OL, 6-1, 265, CMR High School
Salesi Koloamatangi, DL, 6-0, 235, Hamilton High School, Arizona
Trenton Woodward, OL, 6-5, 240, Three Forks High School
Ryan Handley, OL, 6-2, 230, Missoula Hellgate High School
Travis Crawford, LB, 6-3, 200, Missoula Big Sky High School
Lee Hughes, LB, 5-9, 160, Big Timber High School
Trevor Frandsen, DL, 5-11, 230, Missoula Big Sky High School
Kyle Watson, FB, 6-1, 220, Lambert High School
Jonathan Gragg, LB, 6-2, 210, Missoula Hellgate High School
Elijah Dennison, DL, 6-2, 245, Enumclaw High School, Washington
Quintan Boos, LB, 6-0, 205, Malta High School
Dylan Schmidt, PL, 6-4, 275, Lakeside High School, Washington
Dauntarious Williams, WR, 6-3, 200, Silver Valley High School, California
Tovati Gasetoto Jr., LB, 6-0, 215, Washington High School, Washington
Nate Loutzenhiser, QB, 6-0, 190, Sand Point High School, Idaho
Alec Wagner, LB, 5-11, 210, Laurel High School
Traejun Foard, CB, 6-0, 185, Basha High School, Arizona
Paxton Maki, LB, 6-0, 165, Belt High School

Breakdown by Position: 2 QB’s, 2 WR's, 1 TE, 4 OL, 1 FB, 4 DL, 7 LB, 1 DB.

Breakdown by Location: 11 from Montana, 2 from California, 3 from Arizona, 2 from Washington, 2 from Idaho, 1 from Nevada.

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