Lights hit the spring ground running
By Chris Peterson
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As the weather starts to improve, it means that spring in Montana is nearly upon us and for the players on the Montana State University-Northern football team, it means they are back at it with spring football.

However, this year's spring football is a little different than it has been in a long time at Northern, and that's because there is a new head coach in Aaron Christensen, who has taken over the reigns as head football coach at MSU-N. And even though it may not be exciting, his first order of business is to get his new offensive system put into place.

Northern began spring drills with practices Wednesday and Friday, and will continue with three more practices this week.

"I thought our second day was better than first," Christensen said after the team's second spring practice last Friday. "Today was our first day in pads. It was slow and right now we are just trying to get everyone on the same page.

"We just want to make sure that we have the right tempo," he added. "We want to make sure we learn how to practice. Then we will get more to the offensive and defensive stuff, but right now we just want the right tempo and have them understand what we want to get out of certain drills."

Although there was some light scrimmaging near the end of practice, Christensen said at this point, the main focus, at least on the offensive side of the ball is getting the new system installed.

"Right now we have inside zone installed," He said. "That's it.

"It's hard to judge when you have only been out (to practice) twice," junior running back Zack McKinley said. "It was kind of rough the first day with the new offense and everyone trying to figure everything out, but today it flowed pretty good. Plus, we were full pads so that made things better."

Even though the Lights have not installed much of their new offense, McKinley, who has rushed for over 1,000 yards in his first two seasons, said he likes the new system.

"It's a lot quicker," McKinley said. "I like it, but you also have to be more focused. Everything is quicker; it's fast paced."

Yet, the defensive side of the ball is not undergoing those same changes and that's because Jake Eldridge, who was the interim head coach last season, has returned to his post as defensive coordinator.

That has made the transition on defense a little bit easier on returning players on that side of the ball, such as Tyler Craig, who earned Frontier Conference Second-Team All-Conference honors as a defensive end last season.
"Things are a little bit different under a new coach but it's gone good so far," Craig said. "I think we just need a couple more practices to get everything going. We have two practices in the books and I think we look pretty good, and once the offense gets things down a little better. But everything is coming together well."

Northern will continue to have spring practice Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 4 p.m. through mid-April. The Lights will conduct a scrimmage April 4 and hold their spring game April 18.

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