Lights go to work
Northern opens fall camp Thursday
By George Ferguson
August 5, 2015

At 4 p.m. Thursday, the countdown clock will officially begin for the Montana State University-Northern football team. That's because the Lights will take to the practice field for the first time.

Northern opens its season on the road at Dickinson State University Aug. 22, so that gives first-year head coach Aaron Christensen 16 days to prepare his troops.

"Excited to get started," Christensen said ahead of last week's Frontier Conference media day, where the Lights were picked eighth in the Frontier Conference Preseason Coaches Poll.

And the Lights should be excited to get going. Northern had a productive spring, implementing Christensen's new offensive system and engaging in some great competition through two full scrimmages. The Lights also took some positive momentum into spring, and the beginning of the Christensen era when they toppled Rocky Mountain College in the final game of the 2014 season last November in Billings.

Now, however, the Lights, with nearly 40 new recruits in fall camp, will use the next 16 days to get ready to play the rival Blue Hawks and to get ready for the rugged Frontier Conference. Northern went 3-8 a year ago, and while there will be plenty of new faces in fall camp, MSU-N does have key players to build around.

At the top of that list are junior running back Zach McKinley and junior defensive end Tyler Craig. McKinley led the Frontier in rushing a season ago and was a First-Team All-Conference performer, while Craig led the league in sacks. Running back Mario Gobbatto, defensive tackle Patrick Barnett, linebacker Tucker Dunn, cornerback Malcolm Manual and lineman Pete Morales also give the new Lights a veteran presence in camp.

Northern begins fall camp Thursday afternoon at 4 p.m. Camp will continue through Aug. 20, before the Lights travel to Dickinson, North Dakota, to open the season Aug. 22. MSU-N will then have a week off before playing its home and conference opener against Montana Tech Sept. 5.