Lights making progress in the heat
By Chris Peterson
August 12, 2015

The 2015 season is coming up quickly for the Montana State University-Northern football team and with just 10 days before their season-opener, every practice is critical. That’s why, despite the unforgiving heat, the Lights were back at work Tuesday, twice.

Northern, which has been practicing two times a day to prepare for its opening game at Dickinson State Aug. 22, possesses a young roster, and it has taken time for things to gel under the direction of first-year head coach Aaron Christensen. But, after almost a week into fall camp, things are starting to come together.

“I thought practice was good today,” Christensen said. "It was tough conditions with the heat, but we fought through it. We have gotten all of our installs done on offense and the guys are really picking it up well.

One big question facing Christensen and the Lights is who will be under center for the opening game against DSU. During the spring, the competition was between Jess Krahn, Herman Smith and Holden Maki. And at this point, Krahn is starting to separate himself.

In a 7-on-7 drill, Krahn connected on a number of passes to wide receiver Seth Roemmelle and tight end Kagen Khameneh. Maki, who was taking snaps with the second team, also had some impressive throws and caught the eye of his head coach. Smith, who was in pads for the first time Tuesday, saw few reps.

"At this point things are still pretty wide open at quarterback," Christensen said. "I think that Jess is playing really well right now. He made some good throws. Holden also threw the ball well and he is playing well, so we aren't going to make any decisions on that until it's down the road a little bit."

Yet, as good as the quarterbacks looked in 7-on-7, when the offense and defense came together for an 11-on-11 period at the end of practice, it was a completely different story. Despite the fact that Northern has arguably the best running back tandem in the Frontier Conference, there was little ground to be gained against the Lights' defensive front.

Led by defensive ends Tyler Craig and Jordan Brusio, the first-team defense dominated the first-team offense in multiple series and barely gave up as much as a first down. On one play, Craig, a Second-Team All-Frontier defender a year ago, burst off the edge for what would have been a sack if the play hadn't been called dead. Then, later in the series, Brusio, a junior from Billings, made his presence felt with a pass deflection. The defense also held both Zach McKinley and Mario Gobbato to minimal gains on numerous rushing attempts.

"I think our defense is playing excellent right now," Christensen said. "I think we have some really talented guys back from last year and right now they are playing really well. They got after it today and I know that
they are a hard-nose unit and they are always going to give it their all. I am actually really excited about our defense."

The Lights will continue to hold two-a-day practices for the next three days, with morning practices starting at 8:30 a.m., and evening practices getting underway at 4 p.m., as Christensen tries to get his team prepared for its fall scrimmage this Saturday at the MSU-N practice field. The scrimmage will start at 1 p.m.

"Right now we just want to fine tune some things," Christensen said. "We have a base installation in, it's just making sure that this stuff is becoming automatic and that's what we are trying to accomplish in the next couple of days. We have a lot of time to learn and not a lot of time to learn it."

Havre Daily News website