

MONTANA STATE NORTHERN (1-4) AT EASTERN OREGON (1-4)

GIMME FIVE — KEYS TO SATURDAY’S GAME

1. TAKE CARE OF THE FOOTBALL

Turnovers have been a trouble area for both teams. While it is one of those sports cliches, it is also very true that whoever limits their own miscues will have the best chance to win Saturday.

2. ESTABLISH THE RUNNING GAME

With the Mountaineers’ reinforced focus on the ground game, it will be even more important that they get this going. Tim Camp’s teams always have an effective running attack, and they need it Saturday.

3. MAKE MSUN BEAT YOU ON THE GROUND

The Lights’ run game has not been effective either this season. While EOU does need to stop the run first, I would focus on locking down the MSUN pass game and force the Lights to run.

4. BUILD AN EARLY LEAD, AND HOLD IT

Eastern has led only one team this season — and its the team it beat, Southern Oregon. EOU must start strong and lead early, as doing so will allow the Mountaineers to dictate the style of play.

5. BEGIN TO ESTABLISH THEIR IDENTITY

Eastern is looking to re-establish its identity as a physical football team on both offense and defense. This is the Mountaineers’ first of six opportunities for EOU to brand itself as the team it wants to be.

SATURDAY’S KEY MATCHUP

MSUN QB Brenden Medina

KEY STATISTIC: In his best game, passed for 389 yards and four touchdowns against Carroll College.

Medina has been the offense for MSU-Northern this fall. The freshman is third in the Frontier Conference in yards per game passing. He’s thrown for more than 250 yards twice and has two other games with 247 and 245. He was limited, though, to just 66 yards against Montana Tech, and has been turnover prone with 11 interceptions. Given the Lights’ lack of a run game, it will be incumbent on him to keep the chains moving against the EOU secondary.

EOU DB Haziel Ledezma

KEY STATISTIC: Team’s leading tackler with 30, has eight twice this season, and three career INTs.

Ledezma is the player named here, but Eastern Oregon head coach Tim Camp said the battle of Medina against the secondary of EOU will be worth watching. If the Lights are full-go at receiver, that gives them three good players going against the likes of Ledezma, Zack Jacobs, Eric Prom and Garrett Yunker. Don’t be surprised to see the Lights put the ball up a ton Saturday, and with Medina’s turnover propensity, it could give the Mountaineers a chance for a couple picks.

EDGE: LEDEZMA

BY THE NUMBERS

MSUN INDIVIDUAL STAT LEADERS

	C-A-I	Pct.	Yards	TD	Yds/G
Passing					
Brenden Medina	101-200-11	50.5	1,210	11	280.6
Rushing					
Jett Robertson	52	165	3.2	0	33.0
Cameron Taylor	38	154	4.1	0	30.8
Andre’ Proctor	21	48	2.3	0	24.0
Keagan Stroop	8	33	4.1	1	8.3
Receiving					
Bryce Bumbgardner	22	242	11.0	2	48.4
Marvin Williams Jr.	20	286	14.3	5	71.5
Damari Cual-Davis	20	239	12.0	2	59.8
Jake Horner	12	145	12.1	1	29.0
Jared Eisenbarth	9	77	8.6	0	15.4
Keagan Stroop	7	121	17.3	1	30.3
Punt Returns					
Marvin Williams Jr.	1	13			13.0
Kick Returns					
Cameron Taylor	11	263			23.9
Field Goals					
Troy Dayak	4-6	66.7	1-1		44
Tackles					
Jaren Maki	10	28	38		2.0
Jake Norby	15	18	33		2.5
Japerri Powell	19	13	32		3.0
Riley Hunter	13	13	26		1.0
Shadarius Jenkins	14	11	25		4.5
Justin Pfeiffer	5	19	24		2.0
B.J. Hatcher	10	14	24		3.0
Jeff Tinae	7	14	21		0.5
Interceptions					
Riley Hunter	2	16			8.0

EOU INDIVIDUAL STAT LEADERS

	C-A-I	Pct.	Yards	TD	Yds/G
Passing					
Kai Quinn	74-165-9	44.9	881	4	176.2
Rushing					
Victor Dias	42	134	3.2	0	26.8
Kaler Moore	28	111	4.0	2	22.2
Kai Quinn	32	90	2.8	1	18.0
Quincy Backes	16	29	1.8	0	5.8
Jamill Thomas	3	18	5.0	0	18.0
Receiving					
Saige Wilkerson	14	266	19.0	1	53.2
Isaiah Thomas	16	184	11.5	0	36.8
Phoenix Milhollen	7	111	15.9	1	22.2
Conner Falk	11	90	8.2	0	18.0
Christian Blaser	6	85	14.2	1	21.3
Tanner Zenke	6	81	13.5	0	16.2
Punt Returns					
Chase Van Wyck	1	25			25.0
Kick Returns					
Tanner Zenke	13	299			23.0
Isaiah Thomas	5	52			10.4
Field Goals					
Jaiden Machuca	5-5	100.0	0-0		33
Tackles					
Haziel Ledezma	18	12	30		0.5
Isaiah Cranford	13	11	24		3.0
Eli Teuteu	10	11	21		1.0
Sage DeLong	11	9	20		6.0
Peter Manville	15	5	20		0.0
Chase Van Wyck	10	10	20		2.5
Interceptions					
Zack Jacobs	3	0			0.0

POSITION MATCHUPS

BACKFIELD

Both teams have struggled to get their running backs going and have starting QBs who have throw 20 interceptions between them. Medina isn’t better than Quinn, but so far this fall has been more consistent.

RECEIVERS

Neither Marvin Williams Jr. or Damari Cual-Davis played in the Lights’ last game, but are listed on the MSUN two-deep for Saturday. If they are good to go, that gives Northern multiple options for Medina to throw to.

OFFENSIVE LINE

While the teams are about even on yards gained on the ground, Eastern has an edge in that it’s not allowing sacks at a particularly high rate. And, eventually, the line will open up holes for the run game. It will happen Saturday.

DEFENSIVE LINE

Both teams have allowed a lot of yards on the ground, but it’s a bit skewed against EOU as it also had an opponent in the mix in College of Idaho that the Lights have yet to play. The Mounties’ line will be better.

LINEBACKERS

It’s hard to go against EOU here, even in what has been a tough start to the season. You expect the likes of Isaiah Cranford, Chris Kindle, Eli Teuteu and company to turn in a big game. I think they will Saturday.

SECONDARY

Zack Jacobs is one of the top defensive backs around. How he and the rest of the secondary do against Medina and the Lights’ receivers will be entertaining. The talent advantage goes to EOU.

PREDICTION: EASTERN OREGON 35, MONTANA STATE NORTHERN 24

EASTERN OREGON SCHEDULE/RESULTS											
											
AT COLLEGE OF IDAHO	AT SOUTHERN OREGON	VS. MONTANA TECH	AT PORTLAND STATE	AT MONTANA WESTERN	VS. MONTANA STATE NORTHERN	VS. SOUTHERN OREGON	AT MONTANA TECH	VS. COLLEGE OF IDAHO	AT ROCKY MOUNTAIN	VS. CARROLL COLLEGE	
LOSS	WIN	LOSS	LOSS	LOSS	Oct. 12 6 p.m.	Oct. 19 1 p.m.	Oct. 26 Noon	Nov. 2 1 p.m.	Nov. 9 Noon	Nov. 16 1 p.m.	
48-12	24-21	35-10	59-9	49-13							

It hasn’t started well, but can still end well

There’s no way to sugarcoat it. The beginning of the season have not gone the way the Eastern Oregon University football team or its fans hoped for.

Eastern comes out of its bye week 1-4, and is 1-3 in the Frontier Conference. Where there is concern is that those losses haven’t been close. All four have been by at least 25 points, and the Mountaineers have trailed by 32 or more in each contest. To put it bluntly, save for the squeaker they won against Southern Oregon, the Mounties have been getting blown out each week.

There are concerns on the offensive side of the ball. Five weeks in, Eastern is averaging just 13.6 points per game. The team has not been able to get its ground game going, averaging just 81.4 yards rushing per contest and eclipsing 100 yards only once. The passing game has been better at 193, but is nowhere near the 300-plus yards EOU averaged through the air in 2018. The team has 12 turnovers, already more than half of what it committed a year ago.



FROM THE SIDELINE
RONALD BOND

The defense has its own concerns. EOU’s opponents are averaging 42.4 points per game, gaining 225.4 yards per game on the ground and 244.2 through the air. That’s almost 470 yards per game total. They’ve forced just seven turnovers, and have allowed four of their opponents to score 35 or more points. Even if you take the Portland State game out of the mix, the numbers aren’t much better.

Yes, the start has been bad. But my intent here isn’t to bash the team. The introduction to this column is to simply lay out what has happened.

Keep this in mind, too: Eastern has been here before, even in the Tim Camp era.

And in those times, EOU found a way to come away with a respectable season in terms of wins and losses, given where it was. The 2010 team started 0-3. The 2013 team started 0-4, and had the

worst loss this decade in a 73-20 home setback against Southern Oregon. The 2015 team started 0-3, then was 1-4. The 2017 team was 2-6 late in the season.

Those teams finished, in order, 5-6, 6-5, 4-7 and 4-6. They had a combined 1-11 start in their first three games each season, and finished 18-12 from then on.

The 2013 team had the most stark of turnarounds. There are two shocking results when looking at what the 2013 team did — and which is more shocking is up for debate. A week after getting drubbed by 53 points and dropping to 0-4, Eastern Oregon welcomed in a Carroll College team that was undefeated, ranked third in the nation, and would later reach the national semifinals.

The Mountaineers upset the Fighting Saints, 35-31.

That started a streak of winning six times in seven games to end the season, and included a 38-37 road win against the same SOU team that had soundly beaten the Mountaineers just a few weeks prior.

I’m not saying that just because

it has happened in the past, doesn’t mean it will happen again.

What I am saying is that it can happen again.

But that is only if the Mountaineers evaluate and address the issues within the program, which Camp did during the bye week.

It’s included meetings with every member of the program and individualized improvement plans from those members — from players to coaches to training staff.

It’s included identifying where the Mountaineers lost their way, so to speak, either on the field or in the mental game, and addressing that.

It’s included a plan to return to a physical brand of football.

Camp wants to get back to that. Eastern needs to get back to that.

Will all this translate to wins? Perhaps, but not necessarily right away. The culture needs to be re-established, first.

It will result, though, in progress, and right now, progress needs to happen. If it does, the end to the season will almost assuredly be better than the start.

EOU looks to get physical to right ship

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

Physical.

Eastern Oregon University head football coach Tim Camp used that word several times and in several ways when describing the nature of football he wants to see back in the Mountaineers’ program.

“You have to have that mentality that if you get an opportunity, you gotta go play at a high level, but it’s people wanting to go throw their bodies into people, people wanting to get that extra yard, people wanting to make the play on the goal line,” he said. “That’s physicality, and that’s a brand of football that Eastern Oregon has been known to be. We’ll get back to that.”

As a result, the bye week was not an easy one for EOU. But it was one that saw the program address what led to the 1-4 start to the 2019 season and begin to correct those items in the second half of the season, which begins Saturday night with the Mountaineers’ homecoming contest against Montana State Northern.

“We were very pleased with the bye week progress,” senior running back Victor Dias said. “Clearly we had a lot of work to do, and we still have a lot of work to do, but it was a very productive week. That’s the best you can expect from a bye, of course — working on getting people healthy, but (also) working on our individual jobs. I feel like (on) both offense and defense we made progress, for sure.”

Eastern’s start to the season hasn’t measured up to its hopes or expectations and resulted in Camp making a thorough evaluation of the program during the bye to right the ship.

“We’re not sugarcoating anything around here,” he said. “We understand where we’re at and I’m going to work my tail off to get it fixed.”

One of the missing items was the physical, bring-it-at-you brand of football that helped take EOU from an afterthought to a Frontier Conference contender.

Camp said the past couple of seasons, he had tried to merge some different styles together, but needed to return EOU to its roots.

He said watching Stanford use the physical brand it has played with for years work — even while undermanned — in an upset win over Washington last week-end further made the point stick for him.

“I watched Stanford dismantle UW, and it just reconfirmed my thoughts. They had five offensive linemen out, and they still went in there and went face to face with (maybe) the best defense in the Pac-12. Are we Stanford? Are we UW? No, but the physicality in football, no matter what level, you have to have some form of it, and you have to have a mental toughness to be able to do it over and over again.”

The drills run by EOU during the bye were done in a way to start rebuilding the mental and physical toughness.

Camp said the Mountaineers worked on team run drills to cause the offense to work on being effective in the run game and the defense to be effective in stopping it.

“We (also) have what’s called a ranger drill (in special teams). We did that for two straight days to find out who wants to go beat somebody with speed or get physical with them,” he said. “(We’re) making sure we can come downhill on somebody.”

Senior linebacker Isaiah Cranford said the bye week was effective.

“We definitely increased our mental toughness and our focus during the bye week, and it’s helped coming into (this week),” he said. “I think we’re a lot more physical team than we were before, and our focus has increased tenfold. (There was) a lot of competition, and then fast speed, so we stay focused throughout (bye week drills), especially when we’re tired.”

Hustle has also been emphasized, and senior defensive back Haziel Ledezma said the hope with that is to stop one of the primary backbreakers for EOU’s defense — big plays.

“One of the biggest things we’ve been working on is running to the football. That’s huge in football. That’s how break-away plays happen, and that’s how teams get momentum going — with those big plays. I think the biggest part is that we’ve been giving up the big plays, and that’s really been hurting us. It hasn’t been that we’ve been getting our butt kicked throughout the whole game, but we’re giving up the big plays.”

Even with the slow start, there is an energy within the team, and an optimism that things can get turned around.

“Winning the last six games (and) winning seven games total, which is what we fully expect to do,” Dias said when asked what the team is capable of in the weeks ahead. “We don’t go into any game without expecting to win.”