Homecoming game loss analysis

University of Montana--Missoula. Office of University Relations

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MISSOULA, Mont., Oct. If one were to seek out a key factor in Montana's four consecutive losses to Skyline foes—especially Saturday's give-away 26-13 defeat at the hands of the Denver Pioneers—an accusing finger certainly must come to rest on the "fumbles lost" portion of the Silvertip statistics.

The Grizzlies have fumbled 17 times, not an inordinate number considering that four opponents also have fumbled 17 times, but at that point the similarity ends. Montana has lost 10 of those miscues while opponents have lost but four.

A pair of lost footballs Saturday had much to do with the outcome of a contest that seemed in the bag for the Montanans. On one occasion halfback Matt Gorsich fumbled away a touchdown when he was hit on the Denver two-yard line. The alert Pioneers pounced on the pigskin to avert a score that may well have broken up the game.

The other instance set Denver up for its go-ahead tally and perhaps was the most crucial of the afternoon.

The combination of factors that led to Montana's downfall still were bewildering to coach Jerry Williams Monday.

"We fumbled the game away," Williams declared. "But the funny thing about it is that the most aggressive team on the field usually recovers the fumbles."

"We were the most aggressive—-at least for three quarters, yet we failed to recover any of our five fumbles," he said.

"Other than those fumbles, I was well satisfied with the teams' performance." Williams said. "For three quarters they played like a winning football team. And that's a tremendous improvement over our past performances."
"Utah State has a much better team than Denver," Williams asserted. "We're going to have to play a superior brand of ball if we expect to leave Logan with a victory."

The Grizzlies' offense began to show a spark after three rather dismal offensive showings. Key to the resurgence is Earl Keeley, who now is back in top shape.

Saturday Keeley ran the ball club like a field general should and began to hit his potential as a passer by completing eight of 14 attempts for 166 yards and one touchdown.

On the ground Grizzly back paced by a 56-yard effort by Gorsich picked up 155 yards. Despite his performance Saturday, Gorsich may find his position endangered by Howie Johnson, a senior halfback who clipped off 32 yards and was a crucial figure in one of Montana's touchdown drives.

Karl Benjamin, Montana's 235-pound left tackle, came through with a stout performance, his best of the year.

But the outstanding performer on the field again was Montana's stellar junior guard Stan Renning. Renning was an unanimous choice as outstanding lineman of the game.

When he left the field with less than two minutes to play, he received a standing ovation from a Homecoming crowd of more than 8,000.

The Grizzlies now have lost two ballplayers for the season. The latest casualty is Bill Harden, starting junior center. Hardin ruptured a disk in his neck in the Utah game Sept. 21, but the injury was concealed by the lad until it was severely aggravated two weeks ago against Brigham Young. Since that time he has been under a doctor's care and the latest word is that Harden will not be able to compete again this year.

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The other player lost for the season is senior quarterback Roy Bray, who also was injured in the Brigham Young game.

Saturday's tilt cost Montana for a week the services of Lou Pangle, top defensive end who suffered a severe ankle sprain.

Sophomore wingback Russ Grant and Junior tackle John Dixon suffered shoulder injuries but are expected to be in shape to play this weekend.

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When Stan Renning was voted outstanding lineman in the Denver game, it marked the fourth straight week that he has earned this honor.

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Penalties have played a crucial part in Montana's grid season. While the Grizzlies have less penalty yards than their opponents—199-275—the first downs by penalties—8 for opponents, 2 for Montana—show that the red flags came at most opportune moments for Montana's adversaries.

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Matt Gorsich, junior halfback from Highland, Ind., leads his teammates in three statistical categories—rushing, pass receiving and kickoff returns. Matt has carried the ball 47 times for a net of 211 yards; caught two passes for 76 yards; and returned six kickoffs for 142 yards.

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