

Schedule changes coming to the Frontier

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The Frontier Conference football season is less than two months away.

And when games begin in Havre, Butte and Billings on Sept. 3, fans might want to take note, and maybe a picture, because a year from then, things will certainly look a lot different.

Back in February, the Frontier recently voted to add Dickinson State University as a full member to the league, as well as Southern Oregon University as an associate, football-only member. And in the case of football, both the Blue Hawks and Red Raiders will begin competing in the Frontier in the fall of 2012.

And while both schools are regional rivals for some Frontier teams (SOU and Eastern Oregon play every year, while MSU-Northern and DSU played a nonconference series for several seasons, DSU currently plays Rocky Mountain College and the Blue Hawks have faced Carroll College many times in the NAIA playoffs), the league schedule is going to change somewhat in 2012.

Initial plans have the Frontier set up as a two-division conference starting next year in football. One division has Carroll, Northern, Rocky and Dickinson State, while the other will feature Montana Tech, UM-Western, EOU and SOU. And with two divisions comes some difference in scheduling.

The league will still play a 10-game conference schedule according to recent reports, but on teams inside their respective divisions will play each other both home and away. Presently, the Frontier plays a 10-game schedule with all schools facing off twice per season.

But in 2012, teams from the other divisions will play each other just once in order to make up the balance of the 10-game schedule. For Northern, that could be good in the way of budget constraints, as the Lights should only have to make one trip to Oregon per year, despite the league now having two teams from the state. On years when the Lights travel to EOU, SOU will come to Havre and vice versa.

And for the conference as a whole, it means more viability in the NAIA with two more teams in the league, but it also means some changes for fan bases. With the new-look plan, Montana Tech and Carroll will no longer have their rivalry seen twice per year, as is the case with Western and Rocky. Instead, it will be a more natural rivalry with home and away happening every other season.

So while fans are enjoying this coming Frontier season, they may want to take a good look at what they see because in just another calendar year, big changes are coming to the Frontier Conference football landscape, and things will get even more interesting.

The Preseason honors just keep rolling in for Montana State University-Northern senior Will Andrews. But this time, he's not alone.

Consensus Draft Services recently released its 2011 NAIA Preseason All-American Team, and both Andrews and fellow senior Landry See made the list. Andrews was picked as a defensive end for the team, while See was one of four linebackers chosen. The pair of Lights were also the only two Frontier players selected. The Lights begin fall camp next month.