

George Ferguson Column: Frontier doing a great job of growing

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In this day of fast food media, social media, internet, television and every other way to get your fix of what goes on in the world, it's all about keeping up with the Jones's.

And that's what the Frontier Conference and its member schools appear to be doing.

In the last year, the Frontier Conference has not only done some internal work to strengthen the league as a whole, it's also doing plenty to reach a broader audience.

The first major move the conference made was to expand, and I for one am excited about the future of the league. To align itself with a strong university like Dickinson State, and to add another football member like Southern Oregon certainly strengthens an already powerful conference.

But as good as the Frontier has been in athletics over the years, sometimes, you have to use a scream instead of a whisper to take notice. Especially when your league is predominantly in Montana. Let's face it, most people west of the Mississippi still think we ride to school on horseback and that winter lasts all year round.

It's that kind of thinking when it comes to college sports which has left the Frontier with an uneven amount of respect in the NAIA over the years, despite Carroll College's success in football, despite a powerhouse volleyball program at Lewis-Clark State and despite Frontier basketball being some of the best hoops top to bottom in all of the NAIA. In fact, ask even a strong NAIA fan from New York or Florida what year Rocky Mountain College won the NAIA men's basketball national championship, and they'll probably answer that they didn't know Rocky did that.

At times we're isolated in Montana and to be honest, that's one of the things most native Montanans love about where they live, me included. This is our big, special part of the country, and ours alone.

But it's also, at times held the Frontier Conference back from getting the national respect it deserves.

Outside of Carroll College in football, and maybe LC State in volleyball, the NAIA's power struggle generally resides from the heartland east and into the deep south. And no matter how good a Montana State University-Northern is in football or basketball, or a Montana Tech is in football or a University of Great Falls is in soccer, our Frontier schools don't have the visibility that other leagues have.

And that's why I'm excited about all that the Frontier is doing to change that. The league has signed a deal with Lyon Productions to broadcast every football and basketball game live on the internet. The broadcasts will reach anyone who can log on, and will feature multiple camera angles, graphics and an impartial announcer, just like live television coverage.

The league is also starting over with its television possibilities too. This coming football season, five Frontier Conference games will be broadcast on local CW stations across Montana. This will be the first time in more than seven years that multiple, regular season Frontier games will be seen statewide on television.



Montana State University-Northern's Ben Mitchell (left) drives towards Carroll College's Andy Garland during the Frontier Conference men's basketball championship game last March in Helena. This coming season in Frontier sports, football and men's and women's basketball games will be broadcast live on the internet, as well as several games being televised statewide.

Even the league's decision to broadcast its annual football coaches meeting last week in Great Falls on the internet was a big step forward. The press conference, with all of the league's football coaches was interesting and informative, and it was just another example of the Frontier being proactive about presenting its great product to the masses.

To make the conference more accessible to fans near and far is a smart and great decision, and it will only enhance the conference's visibility and make it even more of a viable commodity in NAIA athletics.

So kudos goes out to Frontier Conference commissioner Kent Paulson, to all of the league's administrators and coaches, and especially to all of the Frontier's schools for helping to make big things happen.

Change is good, and the changes the Frontier Conference is making will enrich all of us who are a part of or are a fan of the league we love to follow.