

Frontier Conference loaded with signal callers

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There is no doubt, the 2010 Frontier Conference football season will feature a league loaded with individual talent.

But perhaps no position in the league is more talented from top to bottom than the most prestigious position of them all — quarterback. And this season, the Frontier might have the best crop of quarterbacks in all of NAIA football.

Heading into the season, which gets under way on the final Saturday in August, five of the six teams in the league return their starting signal callers, and all five of those players are multi-year starters. In a league which has been run-heavy for several years now, it's safe to say the Frontier will be a quarterback league this season.

Of the six teams in the Frontier Conference, only Montana State University- Northern doesn't return a starting quarterback. But that doesn't mean the Lights don't factor into the talent equation there. The fact is, MSU-N is very talented at the QB position — but the difference is, of Northern's four quarterbacks on the roster, one is a red-shirt freshman, one has is a sophomore who has just a handful of games under his belt and two are incoming freshmen, right out of high school.

Still, spring ball produced a starter for the Lights in red-shirt freshman Derek Lear from Fairfield. Two years ago, Lear (5-11, 175) was a prized recruit out of the Class B ranks, and this past spring he and Helena native Matt Reyant battled it out for the starting job. Lear came out ahead in the race, but Reyant, who filled in for then senior Jeff Van Nest last season, figures to see time on the field this fall, according to MSU-N head coach Mark Samson.

Northern is also bringing a talented and highly regarded Arizona prep recruit in Travis Dean, and the Lights also signed Havre's CJ Evans this past spring. So, while MSU-N doesn't have the experience at QB like the rest of the league, in no way is the cupboard bare there either.

Still, the rest of the Frontier has the luxury of coming into a new season with quarterbacks who have led their teams up and down the field in the highoctane Frontier for years now.

At Rocky Mountain College, the Battlin' Bears get back NAIA All-American Kasey Peters (6-3, 200) for yet another year. Peters has led the nation in passing for the last two years and was also the NAIA's leader in total offense a year ago. In trying to restore Rocky as a football power, the Grand Valley State transfer threw for 4,160 yards and 31 touchdowns last season.

There was some controversy surrounding Peters this summer as he applied for a sixth year of eligibility. The NAIA granted Peters the year, but as of press time, he will miss the first three games of the season. However, with the talented receivers and Rocky's wideopen passing attack, Peters is certainly poised to have another monster season.

And he's not the only one. Another all-american returns this year in Eastern Oregon's Chris Ware. Just a junior, Ware (6-1, 212) has already started 18 games at EOU, has been named the Frontier's Offensive MVP and has led the Mounties to two straight strong seasons, including last year's second-place finish, their highest finish since joining the Frontier as a football-only school.

Ware has been among the NAIA's top offensive players the last two years, and in 2009, he threw for 3,396 yards and 37 touchdowns in EOU's spread attack.

His return this season could mean the Mounties are ready to go after their first-ever NAIA playoff appearance.

Another veteran of the Frontier returns for one final chance at NAIA glory this fall. Havre High product Gary Wagner enters his sixth year at 12-time league champion Carroll College. Wagner has seen more of the Frontier than any other returning player heading into this season, as he redshirted his freshman year when the Saints captured an NAIA championship. Then, during his first year as a starter in 2008, Wagner suffered a broken leg in just his second game, forcing him to miss the rest of that campaign.

Now, Wagner enters his third, and last season as Carroll's starter, and he'll go after the elusive NAIA title which his Saints compete for each and every year. In 2009, Wagner (6-2, 195) was a model of consistency, throwing for 2,739 yards and 27 Tds against just five interceptions.

Wagner finished third in the NAIA in passing efficiency, and he led the Saints to not only another Frontier title, but a berth in the NAIA semifinals.

For his career, Wagner has one of the highest all-time passer ratings in Frontier history entering this season.

Like Wagner, Montana Tech senior Matt Komac has also seen it all in the Frontier. Komac (6-3, 220) has been a stellar dual-threat quarterback, who has started since midway through his freshman season. Last year, Komac had his best season to date, throwing for 2,146 yards and 13 touchdowns, and also ran for almost 700 yards and another seven scores. Komac's ability to make plays with his feet makes him ultra-dangerous, and with his experience, he should have the Orediggers back among the league's elite this season.

The final starter to return in 2010 is UM-Western junior Micah Mamiya. Like Ware and Komac, Mamiya, a native Hawaiian, has been a starter since his freshman season, and he too is a great passer in Western's aerial assault. But his movement is what makes him great.

He's deceptively fast and although he stands just 5-8, he has a strong arm. In an injury-plagued sophomore season, Mamiya still threw for over 2,500 yards and had 16 touchdowns. If healthy, with all of the talented receivers around him, Mamiya could be poised to light up Frontier defense this fall.

Note: This is the first in series of position- by-position previews of the Frontier Conference. Friday's Havre Daily News will preview defensive linemen in the Frontier.