SANDPOINT — Proving that persistence and hard work will eventually get rewarded, former Sandpoint football player Will Andrews was honored this week with a selection on the All-Frontier Conference football team.

The 6-foot-1, 235 pound junior defensive end had a monster season for Montana State Northern, tallying 69 tackles, including a team-high 16 tackles for loss, which was second best in the entire conference, as well as four sacks.

The excellent season was the reward for a lot of behind scenes yeoman work, as Andrews was forced to miss the entire 2009 season with a broken left foot, the second major injury he’s had to endure in his football career.

“For me, to come back and know that the work I did paid off was fulfilling,” says Andrews, whose team went just 3-7 on the season. “This year was rewarding, but I haven’t felt completely satisfied, as a person or as a team. There are so many signs that this could be a great team next year. I’ll be a fifth year senior, and I’ll do everything in my power to go out on top.”

An excellent linebacker and punter while at Sandpoint, Andrews broke his leg in the first game of his junior year, before bouncing back as a senior on one of the Bulldog teams that lost to Bishop Kelly in an epic playoff game.

Andrews wasted little time making his presence felt at the collegiate level, starting as a freshman and then garnering all-league and NAIA All-American honors as a sophomore, despite playing much of the season on the same left foot that caused him to miss the 2009 season.

This year he showed his versatility by not just starting at defensive end and punter, but also playing linebacker and fullback at different times during the year. His Northern Lights head coach says Andrews will do whatever is necessary for the team, and that he has the respect of all of his teammates, coaches and opponents.

“Will Andrews is one of the best football players I have had the pleasure of coaching in my 29 years as a head coach or assistant,” says Mark Samson. “Will is a tremendous talent — hard working, hard-nosed, plays hurt, great intensity and plays with a great deal of emotion. As a team captain, Will is loyal, honest and a true team player.”

Northern Lights defensive coordinator Jake Eldridge also has high praise for Andrews, calling him not just one of the premier defensive ends in the conference, but in the nation as well.

While the odds are long for an NAIA player to make it to the next level, should Andrews stay healthy next season, continuing to play a dream he hopes to keep alive.

“I hope to go on as long as it (football) will let me,” says Andrews, who loves the brotherhood aspect of football the most. “Nobody can take that camaraderie away from you. You can’t beat that feeling on the field. You just can’t.”