Lights could be Frontier contenders now
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It’s just over a month from the start of the 2011 Frontier Conference football season, but it’s never too early to start talking college football. And it’s never too early to start prognosticating.

The 2011 Frontier Coaches Preseason Football Poll should be out soon enough, so before the coaches get together to make their predictions, I thought I’d make mine and see how close I am at the end of the season.

So without taking a too in-depth look at each team (We’ll be doing that plenty in the coming weeks), here’s my predicted order of finish for the Frontier this fall. And it should be a fall to remember as it will be the last before Dickinson State and Southern Oregon join the Frontier football landscape.

1. **Carroll College:** To no one’s surprise, the Saints will be picked by everyone to win the league for an astonishing 11th-straight Frontier title. Carroll lost key players from last year’s NAIA national championship team, but the Saints don’t rebuild, they reload, and while they certainly aren’t unbeatable, they are the clear-cut favorite heading into 2011.

2. **Eastern Oregon:** I’ve been picking the Mountaineers to make the playoffs for the last two seasons, and 2011 might be their last, best chance. EOU returns all-American type players at quarterback and running back, and if the Mounties’ defense holds their end of the bargain, great things could be in store for EOU.

3. **Montana State University-Northern:** The Lights won just three league games a year ago, but the 2010 season was just as close to being a banner one. And now Northern returns a wealth of talent on both sides of the ball, as well as two straight strong recruiting classes, which in turn should turn the Lights right back into a Frontier contender in 2011. If Northern can win the close ones the Lights didn’t a year ago, things could be very good indeed this fall in Havre, and the Lights could be contending for a Frontier title right away.

4. **Montana Tech:** The Orediggers will have to find their way under a brand new coaching staff this season as longtime head man Bob Green retired over the winter. Tech will always be tough on the offensive and defensive lines, but they have question marks at quarterback and in the secondary, and with a new staff in place, it may take the Orediggers a little time to get going.

5. **Rocky Mountain College:** For the last three seasons, the Battlin’ Bears were one of the top offensive teams in the country. And last season RMC’s defense was starting to gel, and as a result, the Bears finally became a pretty complete team. But the Bears now must replace star QB Kasey Peters and several key players on defense, so 2011 will present a host of new challenges in Billings.

6. **UM-Western:** Like at Tech, the Bulldogs have a new head coach, but they also have plenty of talent. Despite finishing at, or near the bottom of the league the last few seasons, Western has never been a doormat, and even with a new regime, the Bulldogs are too talented to just be a doormat this season.

Speaking of Frontier expansion news, a recent Dickinson Press article stated that Jamestown College, which was one of four schools originally invited to join the Frontier Conference, is still considering that
option, but that no formal decisions have been made one way or the other. The article also stated that South Dakota Mines did express some interest in the Frontier, but the school is said to also be exploring NCAA Division II possibilities.

The new Frontier Conference, with DSU and SOU will start in 2012-13 with the new football season and volleyball season.