Frontier preview: The big o-linemen
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It’s no secret that the success of an offense doesn’t just rely around good skill players. Someone, or something has to pave the way for those skill players. And it’s the offensive line which goes unheralded most of the time in football, but it’s that unit which is so vital to a team’s success.

In the Frontier Conference, a team which can boast a solid offensive line can usually go for a conference championship, and then some. It’s been a formula which has worked well at Carroll College over the years. The Saints have boasted one of the top o-line’s in the country, year after year, and they’ll have one of those units again. But Carroll isn’t the only team with a good unit of big men up front this year in the league. In fact, while several teams lost some great linemen to graduation, other teams are stepping up at the position.

Here’s a look at the top offensive linemen in the Frontier Conference for 2011

The Montana State University-Northern Lights had, at times, one of the top offenses in the league a year ago. Skilled players had plenty to do with that, but it was a consistent and steadily improving offensive line which gave Northern a boost. And coming into the fall, the Lights return all five starters on the o-line, including two 2010 all-conference performers.

Back for the Lights are all-conference standouts Matt Cervenka (6-5, 315) and center Jorge Magana (6-2, 285). Both players were newcomers a year ago, but both had outstanding seasons, and both are among the top o-lineman in the conference this season. But they aren’t alone. Northern also returns senior Zeb Olson, another former all-conference performer. Olson missed part of last year with an injury, but is back and ready for a big senior year. Joining Olson are fellow starters Brock Hyder (6-1, 265) and Joe Pittman (6-4, 300). Four of Northern’s five returning starters on the line will be seniors, and with a year together under their belt, and depth behind them, this could be one of the best offensive line’s the Lights have ever had.

While Cervenka and Magana earned all-conference accolades a year ago, Hyder is considered by many to be one of the top returning offensive lineman in the Frontier. And he’ll be a captain this fall for the Lights. Hyder plays right tackle, next to Cervenka, who plays right guard. Magana is the steady center for the Lights, while Olson is at left guard and Pittman at left tackle. Alex Cummings, who stepped in for the injured Olson last season, is also part of Northern’s newfound depth on the line.

Carroll won’t be done on the o-line this year either. The Saints are also big and athletic up front. And they return a pair of NAIA preseason all-Americans in senior Zach Zosel (6-3, 280) and junior Connor Goudreau (6-5, 280). Carroll will also have some newcomers on the line this fall, but with Zosel and Goudreau leading the way, the Saints will once again be nasty up front.

The Saints and Lights have the two most complete lines in the Frontier coming into the season, but there are several more players who are ready to make a name for themselves this season.

Rocky Mountain College returns senior tackle Dima Vasilevskiy (6-4, 290), a two-time all-conference performer, while Eastern Oregon will look to the massive James Thiessen at left tackle. Thiessen is only a
junior and stands 6-5 and weighs 306 pounds. EOU lost several key starters off a strong o-line from last year, but Thiessen certainly stands out.

Montana Tech also lost some big pieces of what was the biggest line in the Frontier a year ago. But the Orediggers have a couple of stars back this season. Leading the way is senior tackle Drew Waltee (6-2, 285), a starter from last season. Tech will also look to junior Matt Study (6-4, 280) to help bolster the line, which is normally one of the team’s strengths.