The Frontier Conference has long been known for its offensive prowess. It’s been a pass-happy league at times, and at others, it’s been a run-oriented league.

Right now, there is an emphasis on great running games in the Frontier and that means, defensive linemen will play a key role in how far teams can go in 2012.

The Montana State University-Northern football team is one of those teams that will look to its defensive line to provide big time run support against a run-heavy Frontier Conference. But the Lights must replace one of the most prolific pass-rushers in school history in Will Andrews, the 2011 Frontier Conference Defensive MVP. Andrews has moved on, working on a professional football career, while the Lights will look to other talents to step up in 2012.

Northern returns several all-conference prospects, including defensive tackles Than Schopp and Mike Carbone. Both saw significant time last season, and Schopp will be in his second season starting in the trenches for the Lights, Schopp (6-1, 245) is just a sophomore, but he registered 33 tackles and three and a half sacks a year ago. Schopp is a stellar runs stopper. Carbone (6-2, 265) played both the tackle and end position for the Lights and will likely be a hybrid lineman again this season. A senior, Carbone is highly talented and is poised for a breakout season in 2012.

Also back at the end position is starter Ryan Craig (6-0, 235). Craig started opposite Andrews for much of the 2011 season and will likely be looked at as Northern’s top pass-rushing threat this season. He too is just a junior but has a wealth of playing experience and, along with junior tackle Corey Budak (6-2, 265) gives the Lights a young, but talented and veteran group in the trenches this season.

When looking at the top linemen in the league, Carroll College usually places plenty of players on that list. And while the Saints will always be talented up front defensively, they did lose a pair of all-conference performers from last year’s squad. Still, the Saints return a great pass rusher in senior Rhakeem Harris (6-4, 256), Harris started for the Saints at linebacker in 2010 but converted to rush end last season. Harris, along with junior tackle Dakota Amy (6-3, 265) will anchor yet another good Saints’ defensive line.

Eastern Oregon and Rocky Mountain College also possess perhaps the two best returning defensive linemen in the league.

The Mounties return sophomore Wes Orr (6-3, 265) at tackle. Orr was big last season, racking up 39 tackles and 6.5 sacks. His sack total last season was second-best in the Frontier. EOU’s defensive line should be very good this season as defensive end Michael Goings also returns. A senior, Goings (5-10, 235) totaled 39 tackles last season and is one of the top speed rushers in the Frontier.

Rocky might have the most dominant defensive player back, as Jake Scarborough (6-0, 280) returns for his sophomore season. He earned first-team all-conference honors a year ago, after totaling 44 tackles and six sacks from the tackle position and he could be a front-runner for defensive MVP this season.
As expected, Western and Montana Tech have outstanding linemen returning as well.

One to watch in Dillon this fall is sophomore defensive end Phil Selin (6-2, 225). Selin started as a freshman and totaled 53 tackles and 4.5 sacks in his rookie campaign. Selin will anchor a younger Western defense this season, while Montana Tech linemen Jacob Workman could have a big year as well. Workman (6-0, 207) is just a sophomore but has already been productive for the Orediggers, and he should be the heart of the Tech defensive line this season.