2012 Frontier Conference Football Preview: Special Teams
Kickers and returners dot the Frontier
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In football, there’s not two phases of the game, but three, and the third one might be overlooked, but often can be the difference between winning and losing.

The Frontier Conference had a stellar year in 2011, in terms of special team’s standouts, and because almost every player who earned Frontier All-Conference Special team’s honors in 2011 returns, this year is going to be even better.

When it comes to special team’s performers, the Montana State University-Northern Lights certainly have their share of good ones.

In the return game, the Lights return senior Kyle Johnston, who was one of the top return men in the NAIA last season. Johnston earned all-conference honors as both a punt and kick returner last season, after he racked up 535 total years between the two. Senior running back Stephen Silva is also back for the Lights and he’s been returning kicks for four years now, so the Lights are more than set in the return game.

The Lights will also have a strong punting game with sophomore Trevor Baum. Baum has been looking very good, booming the ball in fall drills. Meanwhile, Baum and former Great Falls High standout Zack McKinley will take over the place kicking duties for the Lights in 2012. McKinley’s older brother Luke also kicked for the Lights for several seasons.

As far as kickers around the league go, very few teams had to worry about replacing a quality kicker this offseason.

Rocky Mountain College returns senior Nick Knell, who went 11-for-14 on field goal tries last season, while punter Will Mondragon is also back after a successful junior campaign.

The second-most successful kicker in the league a year ago was all-conference performer Yim Sribenjakul of UM-Western, and he too returns. Sribenjakul made 11 field goals for the Bulldogs last season, and has been the starting kicker for three straight years.

The kicking game is always solid at Carroll College, and the Saints return two starters who have been all-conference standouts before. Senior kicker Tom Yaremko has been kicking for Carroll for three straight seasons, while senior Isiah Linnel was an all-conference punter in 2011.

In the punt return game, Rocky’s Travis Bertelsen earned all-American honors a year ago, and is back for his junior season. Bertelsen averaged nearly 16 yards per return in 2011, and is dangerous as they come. The Bears also return all-American kick returner Eric Buer. Also a junior, Buer averaged 26 yards per return and took two back for touchdowns in 2011.

Eastern Oregon has a lights-out return man in Kedrick Starr, another former all-conference standout. Starr led the league in kickoff return yards last season, and was second in punt returns. He has blazing speed and is a threat to take the ball to the endzone every time he touches it.
Montana Tech’s Trent Thomas and Craig Halko are also both outstanding kick returners, while Carroll College sophomore Dustin Rinker will be a dangerous return man for the Saints after they graduated all-everything returner Matt Ritter in 2011.