Frontier Conference Football Preview: Tight ends still play a key role

2013 Frontier Conference Football Preview

By George Ferguson

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The more college football teams advance and adapt the modern-day spread-option offense, it seems the less the tight end position is heard from.

And though most tight ends in the college game aren’t racking up 1,000-yard seasons these days, the position is still as important as ever.

At MSU-Northern, the tight end has always been an integral part of the offense, whether in red-zone and short-yardage situations, or in blocking schemes. And in 2013, the Lights till be breaking in a new starting tight end, as former All-Conference standout Brian Torgerson is now gone.

Last spring, the Lights looked at several options at tight end, and junior John Jansen seems to have emerged as the leader. Jansen (6-3, 235) has good size and speed, and is excellent in blocking for the Lights’ running backs, but can also be a key inside the 20-yard-line, an area the Lights have always liked to utilize big tight ends over the years.

Around the League

Though neither put up staggering offensive numbers in 2012, both All-Conference tight ends in the Frontier are back in 2013.

Southern Oregon’s Clay Sierra (6-5, 245) only caught 18 passes a year ago, but he scored nine touchdowns and earned Frontier First-Team All-Conference honors as a freshman. Sierra has NFL size and is speedy for a bigger tight end. And with graduation hitting SOU’s record-setting receiver group hard last spring, Sierra is also the Red Raiders’ leading returning receiver. So don’t be surprised to see the athletic Sierra used even more in the passing game this fall.

Also back is UM-Western’s A.J. Smith (6-1, 230). As a junior, Smith was a Second-Team All-Conference standout for the Bulldogs, and like Sierra at SOU, will be one of the most experienced receivers UM-W has this season.

Montana Tech returns a three-year starter at tight end in veteran Leif Knatterud (6-3, 230). Knatterud hasn’t put up big numbers over his career, but he’s always been steady, especially as an extra blocker for Tech star running back Pat Hansen.

High-grade tight ends are nothing new at Carroll College, and though he hasn’t emerged with star numbers the last two years, senior Cole Coba could bust out in Carroll’s much-improved passing game this season.
Coba (6-3, 230) has the look of a great tight end, and is an excellent blocker. And if the Saints can get him more touches, he could be one of the best in the league.

Rocky Mountain College and Dickinson State have potential tight end stars this fall as well. The Battlin’ Bears lost a good one on 2012 senior Doug Kamrowski, but junior Tyler Miller (6-3, 230) appears ready to step up. DSU’s Cody Clausen, a 6-5, 220-pound sophomore from Great Falls also has all the makings of a super star at the position.