Frontier Preview: Longevity abounds with Frontier coaches
2013 Frontier Conference Football Preview
By George Ferguson
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It seems like just yesterday. One day Mark Samson was winning Class AA state championships at Helena Capitol High School, and the next, he had become just the second head coach in Montana State University-Northern’s return to football after a nearly 30-year dormancy.

Now, Samson enters his 10th season with the Lights, and in that time he’s certainly made huge strides. Samson’s first MSU-N team went 2-9, but after that, the Lights ripped off for straight seasons above the .500 mark, including the 9-3 season of 2006 in which the Lights made their only NAIA playoff appearance in the modern era of Northern football.

Samson’s coaching career began in 1982 as an assistant at Helena High School under Mike Kramer. In 1984, Samson was hired at Broadwater Co. High School where he served as Defensive Coordinator for the Bulldogs under former Northern quarterback Chuck Harvey for four seasons. Samson’s first head coaching job was at Missoula Loyola (1987-89), and after a 1-7 campaign in 1986, the Rams were 5-3 and 6-2 the following two seasons. Samson also served as head track coach at Loyola for 1988-89.

In the spring of 1990, Samson accepted an assistant position with national powerhouse Carroll College under the direction of Hall of Fame coach Bob Petrino. In his first two seasons, Samson served as wide receiver’s coach and in charge of special teams. In the spring of 1992, Samson was elevated to offensive coordinator/QB’s coach. Carroll was Frontier Champion in 1990 and 1993 and also advanced to the NAIA national playoffs in 1996. In his seven seasons at Carroll, the Saints had an overall record of 41-24.

In the spring of 1997, Samson was hired as head football coach for Helena Capital High School. For seven seasons, the Bruins were one of the best programs in the entire state and achieved state championships in 1999, 2000 and 2002. The 2002 squad was the first high school team in Montana history to achieve a record of 13-0. The Bruins also set a then-state AA record of 26 straight wins. Overall, Samson’s teams were 67-12 and had six state playoff appearances.

Following are the bios of the other eight coaches in the Frontier Conference:

**Mike Van Diest, Carroll**

In his 13 years as head coach at Carroll College, Mike Van Diest has led the Fighting Saints to six NAIA National Championships, and he ran off 12 straight Frontier Conference Championship titles for one of the most dominating runs in college football history. In his time as head coach, the Saints have a Frontier Conference mark of 112-15 for an impressive winning percentage of 92 percent. The Saints have compiled a playoff record of 36-6 over the past 12 years. Van Diest is a 1970 graduate of Helena High School. His career has included stops at his alma mater, the University of Wyoming, the University of Montana, the
University of Massachusetts, and the Big Ten representative, Northwestern University, as an assistant coach. Van Diest has won titles at Montana (Big Sky Champions, 1982), Wyoming (two Western Athletic Conference Championships and one Pacific Division Championship, 1986) and 12 Frontier Conference Championships at Carroll, as well as the 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2007, and 2010 NAIA National Championships.

**Tim Camp, EOU**

Tim Camp enters his fourth season at the helm of the Mountaineer football program in 2011. Camp turned a program that was 1-10 just four years ago into a nationally ranked and recognized one. Eastern Oregon won five games in 2010 and finished third in the very difficult Frontier Conference. In his second season EOU won seven games, which was the third time in the program’s 80-year history that any team has achieved that. Camp's collegiate coaching career began in the fall of 1996 at Western Oregon University, where he coached the offensive line, tight ends and special teams. From 1997-2002, Camp served as offensive line coach, recruiting coordinator and strength and conditioning coordinator at the University of the South in Sewanee, Tenn. In 2000, he was promoted to offensive coordinator.

Camp earned a bachelor’s degree in sociology from Oregon State University in 1995. He was a four-year starter on the offensive line for the Beavers, and received All-Pac-10 honors. Camp signed a free agent contract with the San Diego Chargers after his OSU graduation.

**Craig Howard, SOU**

Craig Howard took over as head coach at Southern Oregon in February 2011. He led the Raiders to a 5-5 record in 2011, including the program's first undefeated home mark in nearly 15 years. In his first year in the Frontier, Howard’s Red Raiders wound up winning nine games, tying for the conference title and reaching the NAIA quarterfinals.

Raised in Grants Pass, Ore., Howard returned to the Rogue Valley after a highly successful high school football coaching career in Florida. Prior to SOU, Howard went 76-23 over his last eight years as head coach at Nease High School (2003-07) and Columbia High School (2008-10) in Florida. At Nease High School he led the squad to the state title game three times, winning a state championship in 2005. His star pupil during his run at Nease was Heisman Trophy winner Tim Tebow. Over his last three years at Columbia High School, Howard’s teams broke 30 school records.

Howard also has a background in college coaching and served as the head coach at Oregon Tech from 1991-92, where he compiled an 8-13 record and was undefeated against Southern Oregon. He served as defensive coordinator for the Owls from 1978-81 and again from 1987-89 and was defensive coordinator at Portland State from 1982-83.

**B.J. Robertson, Western**

B.J. Robertson returns to his alma mater, UM-Western, as head coach for the 2013 season after building a successful career as an assistant coach in programs at Rocky Mountain, Southern Oregon, and Rockford College. Robertson has served as assistant head coach, strength and condition coach, recruiting coordinator, special teams and as a position coach on both sides of the ball. Robertson, originally from Sheridan, Mont., was a running back on the 1994 Frontier Conference Championship and Montana-Western Hall of Fame team. He earned a Bachelor of Science in business education from Montana Western in 1998.

**Hank Biesiot, DSU**

The 2013 season will mark Hank Biesiot's 38th season as head coach of the Blue Hawk football team. During his tenure, coach Biesiot has become Dickinson State's all-time winningest football coach, helping DSU become recognized as one of the finest NAIA football programs in the nation. He has more wins at Dickinson State than all the other previous DSU head football coaches combined (251 wins for Biesiot; 154 wins for the rest of DSU's former head coaches). Coach Biesiot began his career at Dickinson State in 1972 as the defensive coordinator for then head coach Bob Lasater. In 1976, he took over as DSU's head coach. His first conference title came in 1981, a crown he would later regain 15 different times. Since Biesiot became head coach, the Blue Hawks have endured only two losing seasons (3-7 in 2007 and 4-5 in 1977). He has enjoyed winning seasons in 32 of the 34 seasons he has been coaching.
Biesiot came to Dickinson State following four years at Langdon (N.D.) High School. In addition to his coaching duties, Biesiot also works as an associate professor of health and physical education. He was the Blue Hawk baseball coach from 1976-2001.

Biesiot is currently involved in a chase to the top of the record books for all-time wins by an NAIA coach. A debate is ongoing about who will hold rightful claim to the title. Biesiot has won all of his victories with one school, Dickinson State University, which has played NAIA football during his entire tenure. Kevin Donley has attained his record while coaching four different football programs, one of which was not in the NAIA division.

**Brian Armstrong, RMC**

Brian Armstrong enters his seventh season at Rocky Mountain College and fifth season as the head coach. In 2010, Armstrong was also recognized as the Frontier Conference Coach of the Year. Before becoming the head football coach, Armstrong was the offensive coordinator and offensive line coach. He will be coaching the quarterbacks, as well as calling the plays this season. While at RMC, Armstrong has produced a nationally ranked offense.

Armstrong came to RMC after having been the head football coach at Kathleen High School in Lakeland, Fla., where he compiled a 21-6 record in two years. In his two years, his teams won two District 10 titles and were regional finalists in 2005 and regional semi-finalists in 2006. Armstrong started his coaching career in 1996 at Western Montana College before moving to Morgan (Utah) High School in 1997 and then to Broadwater High School in Townsend in 1998-99. Armstrong played offensive line at Western Montana College from 1992-95 and was an All-American his senior year, as well as a two-time all-conference selection. He also wrestled at Western Montana, and his team won the national championship his sophomore year.

**Chuck Morrell, Montana Tech**

Head coach Chuck Morrell begins his third season at the helm of the Oredigger football program. He starts the 2013 season with an 11-11 overall record with Tech and career.

After going 3-8 his first season, Morrell accomplished numerous achievements last fall, going 8-3 and took the Orediggers to the NAIA Football Championship Series for the first time since 2005.

Morrell arrived at Tech from the University of South Dakota, where he served as the defensive coordinator in 2009. Prior to his stint at USD, Morrell coached at the University of Sioux Falls from 1998-2009, where he served as the defensive coordinator and assistant head coach.

During his time at Sioux Falls, the Cougars played in five NAIA national championship games, winning three titles (2006, 2008, 2009). From 2006-2009, the Cougars were the most dominant program in the NAIA, with a record of 56-1. Their only loss in that span was in the 2007 national title game. As a player at Sioux Falls, he was the leading tackler on the 1996 NAIA Division II national championship team. Coach Morrell, who produced 44 All-Conference and 11 All-American defensive players at Sioux Falls, has released numerous DVDs on his "up-tempo 3-4 defense."