Road games in the Frontier Conference can be brutal. Just ask the Montana State University-Northern Lights, who haven't set foot on the turf at Blue Pony Stadium since Sept. 21. In fact, the season is already more than half over and the Lights have played exactly two home games.

But Northern's three-game, month-long road swing wasn't just your average Frontier Conference trip. No, in all three of the Lights' games, at UM-Western, at Rocky Mountain College, and at Southern Oregon, they were going up against a team which was inside the NAIA Coaches Poll. When Northern played at Western, the Bulldogs were ranked No. 15. Three weeks ago in Billings, the Bears were ranked No. 16 and are now up to No. 10. And, in last week's loss to Southern Oregon, the Raiders were basically ranked No. 26, and in the new NAIA Poll, they're No. 22.

MSU-N went 1-2 on the trip, losing at both Rocky and SOU, but the schedule doesn't get any easier for the Lights now that they're home. Now MSU-N has to take on Carroll College for the second time this season, in what will be the Lights' second homecoming game of 2013. Carroll will bring a No. 7 ranking to Blue Pony Stadium on Saturday, as well as a 17-game winning streak against the Lights. The Saints beat Northern 31-3 back in early September in Helena.

So, while the talk of such a brutal road schedule was well-founded for the Lights, turning around and playing Carroll at home is about as tough as it gets.

However, the bright spot is, the Lights are finally at home. They still have plenty to play for this season, including the Frontier championship. Yes, Northern has lost two straight, but the Lights are still in control of their destiny to a point, because not only does MSU-N have an opportunity to make up ground on Carroll Saturday, but the Lights also get Rocky at home on Nov. 16, and that could be an even bigger game provided the Lights haven't dropped another contest by then.

In order to make that happen however, the Lights will need to regroup, and one thing they absolutely cannot do if they want to stay with Carroll, and stay in the Frontier title chase, is, they can't turn the ball over. The Lights threw three more interceptions at Southern Oregon last week, in a game Northern trailed just 10-7 at halftime. The Lights have six interceptions and two lost fumbles in their last two games, and that's been a big difference in why they were unsuccessful against the Bears and Raiders.

Now Carroll comes into Havre with one of the best pass defenses in the Frontier. Not only do the Saints allow a paltry 11 points per game, but they also surrender a scant 183 yards per outing through the air. The Saints are also plus seven in turnover margin this season, which is first in the league, and Carroll defenders have seven INT's to their credit.

So the story of Saturday's huge showdown at Blue Pony Stadium for the Lights will be, taking care of the football. If Northern can hold on to the ball, and find a way to get in the endzone, then Carroll will certainly
have its hands full, and believe it or not, the game will be part of a series of events which helps decide the Frontier championship.

**They're doing it again**

Everyone who counted Southern Oregon out after Frontier losses to Western and Rocky in September will now want to take those predictions back. SOU's 55-28 win over Northern last Saturday was the Raiders' fourth straight victory, and their fifth straight game in which they've piled up more than 50 points and 500 yards of offense.

It's tough to say a loss is a good for a team, but SOU's 63-57 overtime loss to Big Sky Conference member Sacramento State last month obviously jump-started the Raiders. Sac. State is no slouch in the Big Sky, and the fact the Raiders should have beat an NCAA Division I opponent may have been a blessing. Since that time, no one in the league has been able to slow the Raiders down. Northern did it for a half, but SOU blitzed the Lights with 31 points in the third quarter and never looked back.

The Raiders basically did the same thing a year ago, winning six straight games to clinch a share of the Frontier title. Now, SOU is on the same pace, and in many ways, the Raiders can control their own destiny. They Don't hold a tiebreaker over Rocky and don't play the Bears again. But Rocky still has to play at Carroll, and SOU gets its crack at the Saints on Nov. 2. So for the second straight season, the Raiders are bent on making it a wild finish in the Frontier.

**Freshman breaks the Streak**

Montana Tech's four-game losing streak is over, and it was a true freshman from Helena, home of Tech's biggest rival, which propelled the Orediggers to a much-needed win.

Last Saturday in Butte, freshman quarterback Dawson Reardon, from Helena High, threw for 283 yards a touchdown in Tech's 34-14 win over Dickinson State. But Reardon's legs were the biggest factor as he ran in to scores against the struggling DSU defense, which also yielded 144 yards on the ground to Tech running back Pat Hansen.

Reardon is Tech's third starting QB this season. The defending Frontier champions started the year with transfer Herman Tarpley under center. He played in five games, but has been injured some. Former starter Brian Schwarzkoph has also seen action this season, but Reardon got the not Saturday, and shined in his first college game.

**Rocky Forfeit**

The Frontier Conference office announced today officials at Rocky Mountain College self-reported a violation concerning a student-athlete participating on the football team.

The violation involves an internal scheduling issue that resulted in the player not being enrolled in the minimum number of credits required by the NAIA to be considered a full time student. Rocky has filed an appeal of the forfeit and will wait for the NAIA to rule.

**Stop Him**

Carroll College certainly has the best football stadium in the Frontier Conference. But junior running back Dustin Rinker seems to like Blue Pony Stadium too. Rinker, who only became the full-time starter for the Saints this season, after playing behind All-American Chance Demarais the last two years, is having a fabulous season. He's rushed for 778 yards and seven touchdowns on the year. But he didn't have any success against the Lights last month in Helena, where he was held to a season-low 71 yards.

But now Rinker is coming to Havre. In Carroll's last two trips to the Pony, Rinker has left tire tracks all over the field. As a freshman in 2011, Rinker carried 31 times and ran for 241 yards against the Lights in Havre. And last August, under the Blue Pony Stadium lights, he piled up another 94 yards, this time, alongside Demarais as Carroll won the season-opener handily.
So it will be interesting to see which force shows up this Saturday. Rinker has had big games in Havre in his career, but the Lights shut him down last month in Helena. That battle between Rinker and the stout Northern run defense is going to be a big one.

**Think Pink**

Saturday's game between Northern and Carroll will be Breast Cancer Awareness Day at Blue Pony Stadium. Fans are encouraged to wear pink, and the Lights will be adding some pink to their uniforms for the game.