We’re two weeks into the 2014 Frontier Conference football season, and for the first time in over a year, the Carroll College Fighting Saints aren’t in first place in the league standings.

That’s only because the No. 2-ranked Saints haven’t played a game yet. But they’re about to this weekend, and as far as league games go, and even though it’s only early September, games like the Saints are about to play don’t get any bigger.

Carroll will open its season, and defense of its 2013 Frontier title Saturday at Southern Oregon. The game is already being billed as the potential game of the year in the Frontier and is certainly the Game of the Week in the NAIA. The Raiders come into Saturday’s game 1-0, fresh off a demolition of Menlo College, and they are ranked No. 22 in the NAIA Preseason Poll.

And while there’s a long, long way to go, Saturday’s game could have lasting implications on not just the 2014 Frontier championship, but the NAIA national title picture. Two years ago in Ashland, SOU beat the Saints in a wild thriller, which ultimately stopped Carroll’s 12-year Frontier title streak. SOU wound up sharing the conference title and making the playoffs in its first year in the Frontier.

That game, back in November 2012, started what is a new rivalry in the Frontier. Carroll got its revenge last fall when the Saints blasted the Raiders 40-30 in Helena. That game pretty much cinched the league title for the Saints, and kept the Raiders out of the playoffs.

So, there’s certainly some history going on between Carroll and SOU, no matter that the Raiders have only been in the Frontier for two seasons. And Saturday’s game in Ashland should be no different. SOU’s wild passing attack, led by Austin Dodge, will again be a huge challenge for the Saints’ stout defense. And while Carroll is breaking in brand new starting quarterback Mac Roache, the Saints’ massive offensive line, and star running back Dustin Rinker, will put the Raider defense to the test.

One thing is for certain, the winner of Saturday’s game between the Saints and Raiders will have an early leg up on the Frontier title. But it won’t be the be-all-end-all for either team either. That’s because, under a new-look Frontier schedule, Carroll and SOU play twice this season, with the Raiders traveling to Helena Oct. 18. And that’s exciting, because with a rivalry this good, it will be fun to see it twice.

Old friend, new look

Though Dickinson State left the Frontier after only two years, joining the new Northstar Athletic Conference for this season, the Blue Hawks, at least in the short term, have decided to keep some old Frontier rivalries going. DSU and Rocky Mountain College have opened the season against each other for the better part of the last decade, and they did again this last weekend, with the Bears winning 40-21 in Dickinson, N.D.
Meanwhile, when DSU was part of the now defunct Dakota Athletic Conference, the Blue Hawks also played MSU-Northern in a nonconference game, and starting Saturday in Havre, that rivalry also returns.

But when the Blue Hawks (0-1) show up at Blue Pony Stadium, for what should be an emotional home-opener for the Lights, fans will hardly recognize them.

After 38 years at the helm, Hank Biesiot retired at DSU following last season. Longtime DSU assistant Pete Stanton was promoted to head coach, and the Blue Hawks will bring a brand new look to Havre. DSU is playing a much more up-tempo and wide-open offense, while still relying on Stanton’s hard-nosed defense. The Blue Hawks also changed the look of their uniforms for the first time in ages, putting a logo on their traditional grey helmets, as well as upgrading the style of their uniform.

So, while the legendary Biesiot, who is one of the winningest coaches in NAIA history, will never be forgotten, and it will be strange not to see him on the sidelines anymore, DSU seems not only to have a brand new look, but, given how well they played against RMC last Saturday, also seem to be coming to Havre with a new purpose, and with every intention of leaving Blue Pony Stadium with its first win of the season.

**What a start**

The Lights suffered a tough loss at the hands of Montana Tech last Saturday night in Butte. But offensively, MSU-N couldn’t have got the season off to a much better start, and a big reason why was senior receiver Trevor Baum.

Going into the game, Northern knew what it had in senior quarterback Travis Dean, sophomore tailback Zach McKinley and sophomore receiver Jake Messerly. But moving the ultra-gifted Baum from cornerback to receiver was still an experiment prior to Saturday night’s game in Butte.

It’s not an experiment anymore.

Baum, making his first career start on offense, hauled in seven catches for 145 yards, including a 70-yard touchdown catch in the first half. It was a debut for the ages, and it showed the move was definitely worth it.

Now, with Messerly already a known quantity in the Frontier, and Baum playing on the other side, Northern is going to be a very tough cover for even the very best secondaries in the league. And with McKinley running behind a powerful MSU-N offensive line, the Lights are going to keep defenses off balance all season long.

**Brand new**

Longtime fans of the MSU-Northern Lights remember what it was like when there wasn’t football at Northern. And they remember what it was like when football first came back. In reality, it wasn’t that long ago.

Now, fans at the College of Idaho are experiencing that very thing.

After nearly 40 years of dormancy, the program at C of I has been revived, and the first game of the new ear of Yotes football takes place Saturday in Forest Grove Oregon when the Yotes take on Pacific University. It will be an exciting day for Yotes fans, as the long, two-year process of building the program from the ground up will finally come to a head.

It was just over two years ago that C of I announced it would bring back football, and be a part of the Frontier Conference. From there, the program searched for a coach, then recruited a roster, and went through basically a year and a half of practice, spring ball, conditioning programs and a fall camp without being able to play a real game.

But the wait is over now. The Yotes and their fans are finally ready to do it for real. The first game, a nonconference affair against Pacific, is on the road, but one week from Saturday, Yotes’ fans will really be able to take possession of their new team when C of I plays its first home game, and its first Frontier Conference game ever. That game, Sept. 13 against UM-Western, will be a joyous day for C of I. But so will
this Saturday, because even though it’s on the road, C of I will play a real football game, for the first time in a long, long time.

They fought the beast

Many people said it was crazy for the UM-Western Bulldogs to go play the Eastern Washington Eagles, the No. 2 team in the Football Championship Subdivision, on the Eagles’ home field in Cheney, Washington.

Maybe, those people were right. Maybe it was crazy. But the Bulldogs didn’t seem to come out of the game any worse for wear. EWU beat the Dawgs 41-9, a score that many predicted would be much higher. And while star EWU quarterback Vernon Adams threw for nearly 400 yards before exiting the game, the Eagles and head coach Beau Baldwin, appeared to play the Bulldogs straight up. And that’s what makes UM-Western’s effort more impressive. It didn’t appear that EWU laid down in the second half, played backups yes, laid down no.

Of course, had Adams and his band of some of the best wide receivers in the FCS played longer, the score would have been worse, but that doesn’t change the fact that Western went to Cheney and played respectable football, and represented the Frontier Conference very well.

And in the process, the Bulldogs are showing they have arrived in their own league, too. With a 1-0 start to conference play, and a positive experience against a team poised to capture the FCS national championship, Western is more than on the rise in the Frontier. The Bulldogs may have already risen.