In 2014, there were some monster offensive numbers put up in the Frontier Conference — especially in the passing game. And as good as the quarterbacks were in the league a year ago, the wide receivers were equally as responsible.

And nowhere were there bigger numbers put up at the WR position than at Montana State University-Northern and Southern Oregon.

The Raiders won the NAIA national championship with a pass-happy offense that includes two receivers who each went over 1,500 yards a year ago. Meanwhile, the Lights had the top receiver in the conference in Trevor Baum, who caught 85 passes for 1,323 yards and a whopping 131 yards-per-game average. In his only season at receiver for the Lights, Baum was outstanding, and was one of three First-Team All-Conference performers to graduate. Baum’s partner, Jake Messerly, caught another 58 balls for 862 yards last season, and together, they were a dynamic duo.

But, the Lights and head coach Aaron Christensen might have to do some shuffling in the passing game this upcoming season. Baum is gone, while Northern also has likely lost talented youngster Sam Mix, who was injured as part of the tragic and horrific stabbing this spring in Havre.

But, the Lights do have one key target coming back. Always strong at the tight end position, Northern will be again this fall. After two-time All-Conference TE John Jansen graduated after the 2014 season, talented sophomore Kagen Khmananheh (6-2, 225) will step up this season. The former Missoula standout caught three passes for 40 yards a season ago, but he figures to be a major part of the MSU-N offense this season, and he could be one of the top tight ends in the league by season’s end.

Of course, for the fourth straight season, Rocky Mountain College is where perhaps the most talented wide receiver resides. Since his freshman season, Andre McCullouch (6-2, 200) has been terrorizing defensive backs in the Frontier, and he figures to do so again this fall. Already a two-time NAIA All-American, McCullouch is on the radar of the NFL. As a junior, he caught 87 passes for 1,161 yards and 11 touchdowns, while averaging 115 yards per game. In three seasons at RMC, McCullouch has gone over 1,000 yards every year and averaged over 100 yards per game in the same stretch.

Like Northern, SOU lost a great quarterback and his top two pass catchers from last season. Dylan Young and Ryan Retzlaff were phenomenal for Austin Dodge a year ago, but head coach Craig Howard’s cupboard is by no means bare.

SOU may not have its quarterback to replace Dodge yet, but the Raiders have two outstanding receivers coming back. Matt Retzlaff (5-11, 180) and Sean McShane (5-11, 175) return to the Raiders’ passing attack as two of the best wideouts in the league. The younger Retzlaff caught 56 balls for 587 yards last season, while McShane racked up another 500 yards. Together, that duo should help SOU’s transition into the post-Dodge era immensely.
Carroll College also lost a pair of quality receivers from a year ago, including All-American Anthony Clarke. But senior QB Mac Roche still has plenty to work with. Senior Dylan Simac (6-2, 210) is a three-year starter for the Saints, who caught 36 passes for 343 yards and two TDs a year ago. Junior Kyle Griffith (6-1, 180) is a lanky speedster who is also back after catching 45 passes for 742 yards and six scores a year ago.

Eastern Oregon is another program that’s used to pumping out great receivers, and 2014 was no exception as Jace Billingsley earned All-Conference honors for the Mounties. However, Billingsley appears headed to running back for EOU this season, while EOU will also miss the steady Justin Hernandez. However, head coach Tim Camp feels he has two youngsters ready to emerge in sophomore Calvin Connors (5-9, 170) and junior Josh Richards (5-10, 170).

There are also two experienced and talented receivers who are part of the Montana Tech/UM-Western rivalry. At Tech, senior Alec Bray (5-11, 175) is a three-year starter and former All-Conference performer. As a junior, Bray caught 35 passes for 458 yards and three TDs. Western junior Beau Brekke (5-8, 175) also came on strong a year ago, catching 40 balls for 654 yards to lead the Bulldogs in receiving.

Of course, the tight ends can catch passes, too, even if the position is slowly becoming less utilized at the collegiate level. And while Northern has a great up-and-comer in Khamaneh, the College of Idaho has a great one returning.

As a freshman, Marcus Lenhardt (6-4, 225) was the Yotes’ leading receiver, and he earned First-Team All-Conference honors after grabbing 43 passes for 698 yards. Lenhardt is a prototypical tight end and with three more years of eligibility, he’ll be a matchup nightmare for opposing defenses.

Carroll has always had strong tight ends as well, and the Saints have a good one again in senior Nate Hinrichs (6-2, 235).

So, while graduation caused the league to lose some super-talented and productive pass catchers from a year ago, there’s no question, there’s still plenty of guys in the Frontier who will dazzle catching passes this fall.

**Editor's Note:** This is the fifth installment of the Havre Daily News’ series on the top returning players in the Frontier Conference. For a look at the top linebackers in the conference, see Wednesday's HDN.