2011 Frontier Men's Preview
Frontier men loaded with new faces and familiar players
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With Rocky Mountain College winning an NAIA national championship, and Westminster College making a great three-year run at the NAIA tournament, there’s no question the Frontier Conference is loaded with talented men’s basketball players.

But the 2011 Frontier season will look a little different. There’s plenty of talent in the league and the basketball should be as exciting as ever. But new faces dot the league this year and that will make things even more challenging than ever as 17 2009-2010 Frontier All-Conference performers either graduated or transferred before the start of this season.

And perhaps no team endured more change the MSU-Northern Lights, who return just two players with game experience and no starters from last year’s 20-win team. But the Lights have gelled quickly and have plenty of talented individuals to boot. Returning guards Shaun Tatarka and Devin Jackson have joined up with newcomer LaVon Myers to form a very dangerous backcourt in Havre. And fellow newcomer Joe Simpson is giving the Lights a strong inside rebounder and a great defender.

But Northern’s new-look team will certainly be tested this season, especially with some great new players in the league, to go along with some very good returnees.

Here’s a look at even more players to watch this season in the Frontier Conference

The Guards

When guards come up in the discussion of Frontier Conference teams, Westminster, a perennial league power has always had them. But this season a new force, albeit a very familiar name has emerged. Senior point guard Michael Stockton, the son of NBA legend John Stockton is having a breakout campaign. Stockton came to Westminster three years ago and bided his time before earning the starting point guard spot as a junior. Now, in his final season for the Griffins, Stockton is doing it all, averaging 19 points and five assists per game, and he’s a big reason the Griffins are looking like they will keep their Frontier crown.

UM-Western’s run to the NAIA national tournament was predicated on guard-play last year, but the Bulldogs graduated three good ones. However, they return 5-10 junior Brandon Brown, who is leading the Frontier in scoring at just over 21 points per game. Brown can run the point for the Bulldogs, but he’s as good a shooter as there is in the league and is also lighting quick to the rim. Like Western, Rocky’s recent national tournament success had to do with good guards and the Bears have another great one in 6-3 senior E.J. Ross. A talented athlete, Ross can carry a team offensively and is a strong defender as well. In Butte, Montana Tech returns junior point guard A.J. Paine. Paine is a stellar ball handler and a smart player, but, like Brown at Western, Paine can also score in bunches.
UGF hasn’t had much success in the win-loss column the last few years, but that could change in 2011 and it’s due to a stable of talented guards. And leading the way are 6-2 shooters Norman Towns and Melvin Williams. Together, Towns and Williams combined to average 20 points, 14 rebounds and 11 assists heading into league play next week.

The Post

When it comes to big’s, the Frontier has always been a little undersized. But that doesn’t mean the league doesn’t have its share of dominant post players.

And leading the way is returning Frontier Conference Player of the Year Andy Garland. The 6-5 junior forward at Carroll College is perhaps one of the most talented forwards in the country, and he’s proving it again in 2010-11. Garland will start league play averaging a double-double, and he also shoots at a 42-percent clip from the 3-point-line.

A big reason for Lewis-Clark State’s resurgence this season is the play of two returning stars in the paint. Alex King, a 6-6 senior bruiser is one of the most powerful inside players in the league, but he’s equally adept at shooting the ball from the perimeter. And Andrew Packwood (6-8) is another standout post player for the Warriors, who have a very strong front line this season.

When it comes to power in the paint, Westminster can never be overlooked. The Griffins have a pair of great ones this season in 6-7 senior Ben Walker, who transferred to Westminster last season, as well as newcomer Jake Orchard (6-4). Tech also has a strong inside presence in Kellan Hasquet (6-7) as does UGF, which has 6-6 swingman L.J. Jones, who is arguably the most athletic player in the league.