Halfway home: Frontier standings a mess
Frontier Conference Notebook
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The halfway point in the Frontier Conference basketball seasons is here. And what’s become quite clear on both the men’s and women’s side is, the leagues are very deep this season.

On the men’s side, league-favorite Westminster stumbled out of the gate, losing two of its first three games. Yet the Griffins still sit atop the league standings at 5-2. But what’s behind Westminster is a big mess, a four-way tie for second place with MSU-Northern, UM-Western, Lewis-Clark State and Carroll College all sitting at 4-3. And with conference seeding for the postseason and berths in the NAIA national tournament on the line, the next three weeks will certainly be interesting.

And what makes things even scarier is the fact that no team in the league is without a win. Rocky Mountain College (3-4) is just a game out of second place, and Montana Tech (2-5) and UGF (2-5) have combined to beat top teams in the Frontier in Westminster and LC State proving there is no actual cellar dweller in the league this season.

The rise of LC and the continued success at Northern and Western have made the Frontier a league with untold amounts of parity. The Warriors were picked to finish sixth in the league this season, but they have just five total losses and sit at No. 25 in this week’s NAIA Poll. In all this season, four Frontier teams have spent time in the Top 25, and if things stay the way they are, how many teams the Frontier gets into the national tourney in March will be very interesting.

At the halfway point, Western’s Brandon Brown leads the league in scoring and assists and has the inside track on player of the year honors, alongside Carroll junior Andy Garland. But Westminster’s Michael Stockton and Jake Orchard, as well as Rocky’s E.J. Ross might have something to say about that as well.

On the women’s side, things are also a bit confusing at the halfway mark. One thing that is clear however, is Westminster head coach J.D. Gustin knows how to reload. The Griffins have been to four straight national tournaments, and the 2011 version shows no signs of ending that trend anytime soon. Westminster is sitting pretty at 6-1 in the conference, while LC State, the team picked to win the Frontier, is a game back at 5-2.

Like on the men’s side, the women have logjams as well. Carroll and Montana Tech are at 4-3, while the rest of the conference is just two games out of third place at 2-5. That list includes the Skylights (2-5, 11-12). And Northern can make up plenty of ground in the next three weeks with five of its last seven games at home.

The race for the player of the year in the Frontier could come down to LC’s Jasmine Stohr and Northern’s Samm Schermele. Stohr leads the league in scoring at 19 points per game as well as steals. But Schermele is just percentage points behind Stohr and has the most 20-point outings in the conference this season.
This week’s NAIA women’s poll has Westminster ranked ninth and LC State ranked 10th. Carroll and Tech are receiving votes, while the men’s poll has Westminster ranked 16th, LC State 25th and Northern and Western receiving votes.

The second half of the Frontier season starts this weekend with big matchups, including one-game rivalry weekends in Havre and Billings. Northern hosts UGF on Saturday night, while Rocky plays host to Carroll on Friday night.

Lights wrestling well

The MSU-Northern wrestling team remained at No. 9 in the latest NAIA wrestling rankings. The Lights are still rated as the No. 2 team in the Western Region, just behind UGF, which is ranked sixth nationally.

The Lights, who will travel to Ashland, Ore;, for their final regular season dual against Southern Oregon on Saturday, have five nationally-ranked wrestlers in the latest ratings. Former Blue Pony Evan Hinebauch continues to be ranked second at 184 pounds, while Anthony Weerheim is ranked second at 149 pounds. Max Payne moved up to No. 6 at 174 pounds, while Rudy Schaffroth is ranked sixth at heavyweight. Freshman Cameron Neiss is ranked 11th at 133 pounds.

Frontier expansion meetings

Frontier Conference officials, including athletic directors and presidents are scheduled to hold the next round of expansion talks Monday and Tuesday in Billings. At the time, several schools seeking to move to the Frontier are expected to make presentations to current conference officials.