Frontier Notebook: Huge games in Havre, Great Falls

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This coming weekend marks the halfway point in the Frontier Conference men’s and women’s basketball seasons. And oh how the first five games have flown by.

This weekend is also a pivotal one for almost every team in the league, as the schedule flips to part two next weekends.

On the women’s side, Havre and Great Falls will be crucial stops for the two league leaders, Lewis-Clark State and Westminster. LC State took game one of its rivalry with the Griffins last weekend, even without the services of the Frontier’s leading scorer, Jasmine Stohr. Now the two out-of-state teams will visit Montana State University-Northern and UGF for key games Friday and Saturday.

The women’s standings are tight with the Skylights and Western just a game behind second-place Rocky Mountain College and Montana Tech. The Orediggers pulled off a huge home win over Western last Saturday night in Butte to jump right back in the thick of things.

UGF and Carroll bring up the rear right now but neither team is out of the picture. The Saints earned their first win of the conference season when they beat the Argos last Saturday in Helena.

Havre and Great Falls are the sight of huge men’s games too, especially since UGF joined the party last week by sweeping Rocky and Carroll on the road. Last Thursday was UGF’s first win over Carroll since the school reinstated basketball over a decade ago.

Now, UGF will host Westminster and LC State this weekend, with a chance to really make some Frontier headway.

Northern and Western are tied atop the jumbled Frontier standings at 4-1. The Lights host the Warriors and Griffins this weekend, while Western is home to face Rocky and Carroll. The Lights and Bulldogs have a full two-game lead on every other Frontier team, as there is a six-way tie for second at 2-3. This weekend should separate some of those teams from top to bottom, but with sweeps at home, the Lights and bulldogs could run away from the pack regardless.

Shining Defense

Despite ups and downs over the last few weeks, the MSU-Northern women continue to pace the Frontier in scoring defense. The Skylights are allowing just 55 points per game and they hold teams to just under 45 percent shooting.

The Northern men are doing even better. The Lights lead the Frontier and the NAIA in scoring defense, allowing just 55 points per game. Northern is also tops in the league and fourth in the NAIA in 3-point field goal defense. Teams are shooting just 28 percent from beyond the arc against the Lights. In a weekend split with Carroll and Rocky, the Lights yielded a total of just 98 points, including holding the Battlin’ Bears, who were leading the Frontier in scoring offense, to a measly 45 points.
Trifecta

Western’s Brandon Brown is a statistical machine, and he’s only getting better. The senior guard from Seattle is leading the Frontier in scoring, assists and steals heading into the fourth week of play. Brown averages 22 points, four assists and two steals per game – all Frontier bests. Nationally, Brown is ninth in scoring and 15th in steals. In case you were wondering, the top scorer in the NAIA is Kedrick Brown of Philander Smith in Arkansas. Brown is pouring in 32 points per game this season.

Board Warriors

If Frontier teams are going to have an success against the Lewis-Clark State men and women, they better be ready to rebound. The LC State women are outrebounding opponents by an average margin of seven per game. The Warriors have two players who average double digits on the boards in 6-3 Kirsi Voshell and 6-2 Alyssa Fierro. The duo combine to average 20 rebounds per outing. And the Warriors are getting it done on both ends. They also lead the Frontier in scoring at 72 points per game.

As good as the LCSC women are at hitting the glass, the Warrior men are pretty solid too. LC’s P.J. Bolte leads the Frontier in rebounding at eight per game, and as a team, the Warriors lead the Frontier in rebound margin. They are outrebounding opponents by an average of nine per game. Despite being outsized almost every night, the MSU-Northern men have done a good job on the boards this season as well. The Lights are second in the Frontier in average rebound margin. They are plus-8 in that category. The Lights rebound by committee, as they have five players who average four or more boards, led by Joe Simpson at five per game.

Power Rankings

The Lights remain the top-rated team in the latest Frontier Conference men’s power rankings. UGF, with its sweep moved up to No. 4 this week, while Western stayed at two and Westminster is at three. The Bulldogs moved up two more spots in the NAIA poll this week, from No. 22 to No. 20.

Despite a tough loss at RMC Saturday night, the Skylights moved to No. 4 in the latest women’s power rankings. LC State is first, followed by Westminster and Rocky. Despite falling to LC last weekend, the Griffins moved to No. 20 in this week’s NAIA Coaches Poll.