The Frontier Conference is nearing the halfway point in the season. This weekend marks the end of the first half of league games, and it’s been business as usual in the league so far.

With only a month to go in the season, there have been some surprises, and some not-so-surprising results thus far.

On the women’s side, Westminster is the only unbeaten team in league play, and that’s no surprise. The Griffins have really only had one close game since league play started and appear poised to capture another regular season championship.

Meanwhile, everybody is chasing Westminster so far. Carroll stands in second place, but after that, it’s a logjam. Montana Tech and UM-Western are 4-3 in league play, while MSU-Northern, Rocky Mountain College and Lewis-Clark State are all 3-4.

The men’s standings bare a resemblance to what has happened in the Frontier for much of the last decade. Team’s are beating up on each other thus far. Northern, LC State and UGF are tied atop the league standings, and all three teams already have two conference losses with seven games still to be played. Right behind those three is a three-way tie for second with Westminster, Western and Rocky all sitting at 4-3.

So just like in recent years, with a whole half of the season still to play out, the Frontier men’s title is completely up for grabs and it looks as though nobody is going to run away and hide.

New Playoff Format

With the season entering the stretch run, it’s important to point out a significant change in the Frontier playoffs. For this season, only six men’s and six women’s team’s will qualify for the postseason.

The top two team’s on each side will have automatic byes into the semifinals, while the next four will play two quarterfinal games, with the top two remaining seeds traveling to the awaiting semifinalists.

The Frontier has repeatedly changed its playoff format. For many years, the playoffs were played throughout campus sights, but in the early 2000’s, the league went to a traditional tournament format, with the event being held for several years in Butte.

However, a few years back, the league went back to the playoff format, and has now kept that format, but downsized it. And that’s going to make the next few weeks very interesting because there are going to be a couple of very good teams left out of the playoffs.

Rising Stars

Graduation hit the Frontier hard a year ago. In both men’s and women’s basketball, some major stars departed, in places like Northern, Western, LC State and Carroll. But now, a new crop of talented players have emerged.
On the men’s side, UGF’s Marcel Towns was already a great player, but this season, he’s taken his game to new heights. Towns currently leads the Frontier in scoring at 20 points per game and has already earned an NAIA Player of the Week award. Player’s like Montana Tech’s Adam Greger, Rocky Mountain College’s Joel Brandt, LC State’s P.J. Bolte and Northern’s Devin Jackson have also risen to the front of the line of stars this season.

In the women’s game, Western’s Sammi Bignell is leading the league in scoring and is up high in rebounds too. Meanwhile tech’s Mandy Machinal and Kelsey DeWit, LCSC’s Tanis Fuller and Annie Kane and Northern’s Nikki Tresch have joined Westminster’s Nicole Yazzie and Cydney Tibbetts and budding stars in the league.

**Unusual Schedule**

It’s not often in the Frontier that two team’s will play each other twice in a seven-day span. But that’s what the MSU-Northern Lights and Skylights face against the LC State this week. First, Northern has to go to Great Falls Thursday night and those are big games. But then, the Lights and Skylights visit the Warriors Saturday night in Lewiston, Idaho, just seven days removed from playing them in Havre.

That schedule is a break from the traditional way of doing things in the Frontier, but the addition of Dickinson State this season forced the league to do a major overhaul of the schedule. Interestingly, the Argos, who hosted the Warriors last week, already played their road games against LCSC last month. So instead of switching with the Lights and playing LCSC also this week, as per the old schedule, UGF will instead play at Montana Tech on Friday night.

The quick turnaround in the schedule for Northern doesn’t just include playing LCSC twice in one week. After playing UGF on the toad tonight, the Lights and Skylights will turn around and host the Argos next Friday.