

Skylights should continue to rise

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The Frontier Conference volleyball season is less than a month away from getting going. On Aug. 19, many Frontier teams will open the season, including the Montana State University-Northern Skylights.

And while the annual Frontier Coaches Preseason Volleyball Poll is still a week away from being released, I thought it would be constructive to see where my predictions stand up before the league releases theirs.

It will also be interesting to see where my preseason predictions ended up after the Frontier Conference tournament wraps up in November in Butte.

So without going into too much depth about each team in the league, here's my predicted order of finish for the 2011 season.

1. Lewis-Clark State: The Warriors have been at or near the top of the Frontier for some time now, and with a seemingly endless pool of talent, it doesn't appear like their reign in the league will end anytime soon. LC State always boasts outstanding size in the middle and talent on the outside, and the Warriors have been on quite the roll the past few seasons.
2. Carroll College: The Fighting Saints have been a team on the rise for some time now, but it's time they shake that label and ascend to the top of the Frontier. Carroll has the talent and the size to hang with LC State, but knocking the Warriors from their perch will be easier said than done.
3. Rocky Mountain College: Another team which has quietly threatened to take control of the Frontier, the Battlin' Bears will be tough again this season. Rocky has always been a solid defensive team, and the Bears serve well. If the talent on the outside rises to the occasion, it could be a very good season in Billings.
4. Westminster College: The Griffins were a mystery last year, winning some impressive matches but also losing to teams they probably shouldn't have. But with one of the top players in the league returning, and a deep talent pool to recruit from in the Salt Lake area, Westminster should remain as one of the league's contenders.
5. Montana State University-Northern: The Skylights made huge strides last season, but they also graduated a wealth of experience, talent and leadership. But thanks to solid recruiting and a good nucleus of returning players, Northern has a good chance to keep building on the momentum that started in 2010.
6. Montana Tech: The Orediggers were up and down a year ago, and some say they underachieved. Tech is always tough defensively and will be again in 2011, and they will certainly be a tough opponent for every team the Orediggers see across the net this season.
7. Great Falls: After a widely successful run in the first part of the decade, the Argos fell back some last season. UGF is still very talented and the Argos will still play a wide open, offensive-minded game. And while I may not have them picked high this season, they certainly could surprise people by year's end.
8. UM-Western: A once-dominant volleyball powerhouse, UM-Western has won just three league matches in the last five seasons. The Bulldogs are in a tough spot right now, but don't expect them to stay there for long.

Montana State University-Northern head coach Bill Huebsch is conducting a week's worth of volleyball camps at Northern this week and next. The kids camp ran through Wednesday, then the MSU-Northern Team Camp runs Friday and Saturday, while the Select Camp takes place next week. Following the camps, Huebsch and the Skylights will open training camp in preparation for their season-opening matches at the Great Falls/Carroll Tournament Aug. 19-20.

Note: In Friday's Havre Daily News, see George Ferguson's predictions for the upcoming 2011 Frontier Conference football season.