

Frontier Notebook: NAIA Polls have been strange so far

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The NAIA won't release its next men's and women's basketball polls until the beginning of 2012, but the polls themselves are doing a disservice to several Frontier Conference basketball teams so far this season.

And that disservice starts in Havre with the Montana State University-Northern women's basketball team. The Skylights have one nonconference game left in what has been a remarkable start to the 2011—12 campaign. But interestingly, Northern has yet to receive a single vote in the NAIA Women's Coaches Poll. And MSU-N has beaten two NCAA Division II teams this season, as well as a handful of other strong opponents, including two wins over rival Dickinson State, a traditional NAIA DII power and a team which will join the Frontier Conference next season.

In the Frontier Conference power rankings, the Skylights are also getting little respect. Northern is ranked fifth among Frontier teams, despite having a better record than Rocky Mountain College, which is ranked No. 24, UM-Western which is ranked No. 27 and Westminster College, which has a 5-6 record and is still receiving votes in the NAIA Poll. Now, it wasn't a surprise that Northern wasn't picked high in the Frontier, or ranked in the NAIA to start the season. Preseason polls and predictions are based on last year's body of work, and last year's Skylights won just 13 games and four in the Frontier. But after the preseason poll, things are supposed to be based on what a team is doing in the present season and the Skylights have certainly gotten the short end of the stick in that respect. I guess we'll see if the Jan. 9 poll shows any different. By then, MSU-N will have played a winnable game against Mount Royal University at home and will have opened Frontier play against the University of Great Falls.

Even the Northern men are getting a little disrespected in the NAIA Poll this month.

The Lights (12-2) opened the season ranked No. 15 in the country and dropped two spots in the first regular season poll. That was ok considering MSU-N lost a pair of close games. However, since dropping to No. 17, the Lights ripped off six straight wins, including a 30-point destruction of Dickinson State. Yet, in the days following the win over DSU, MSU-N dropped two more spots to No. 19. That's almost impossible to explain considering the Lights are an even more experienced team than they were a year ago when they swept the Frontier Conference regular season and postseason championships.

This past weekend, the Skylights hosted the annual Duck Inn Classic and Northern senior Laramie Schwenke was named MVP of the tourney. Northern's Nikki Tresch, UGF's Kezia Ford, Minot State's Carly Boag, Carroll's Alysha Green and Hope International's Brittany Bauman also were named to the All-Tournament Team.

- Coaches polls have been up-and-down to MSU-N's rivals 110 miles to the south.

In Basketball, people are just starting to take notice of the UGF men's team, which is off to its best start since the school reintroduced sports just over a decade ago. The Argos are 11-1 on the season and have a one-point, 60-59 exhibition loss to the University of Montana Grizzlies on their resume. Still, UGF is getting little love in the NAIA Poll. In the latest men's poll, UGF received one vote, though the Argos have the best winning percentage in the Frontier through mid-December.

Like the MSU-N women, the UGF men will have to wait through the start of Frontier play, a Jan. 7 visit to Northern, to see how much respect the Argos will get in the next poll.

However, the UGF wrestling team is getting plenty of respect.

In the newest NAIA Coaches Poll, the Argos are the new No. 1 team in the country. UGF replaced Western Region rival Southern Oregon in the latest poll. The Argos are loaded with talent this season and it's showing. UGF has a team-high 13 wrestlers who are nationally-ranked this week, including former Havre Blue Pony Myles Mazurkiewicz, who's ranked fifth at 141 pounds.

- The MSU-Northern wrestling team also moved up in this week's poll. The Lights are now ranked sixth in the NAIA, moving up two slots from No. 8 last week. The Lights have lost just two duals this season, one to third-ranked SOU, which was No. 1 at the time, as well as the Argos, who were ranked No. 5 when they nipped the Lights two weeks ago in Great Falls.

The Lights currently have six nationally-ranked wrestlers, led by senior Evan Hinebauch who is ranked No. 1 at 184 pounds. Last Sunday, Hinebauch reached the semifinals of the prestigious Reno Tournament of Champions before finishing fifth overall. The RTOC is a tournament made up of some of the best NCAA DI programs in the country each year.

Also ranked for the Lights is Cameron Neiss, who is fourth at 133 pounds, Anthony Weerheim, who's seventh at 149, Ethan Hinebauch, who's third at 165, Jared Miller is seventh at 174, while Max Payne is 12th at 174.

The Lights return to action Jan. 7-8 at the NWCA National Duals in Springfield, Ill.

NAIA Wrestling Poll

	Pts.	Prv.
1. Great Falls	106	2
2. Grand View	96	4
3. Southern Oregon	91	1
4. Oklahoma City	84.5	5
5. Lindsey Wilson	65	6
6. MSU-Northern	60	8
7. Midland	54.5	7
8. Campbelsville (Ky.)	53	4
9. Missouri Valley	52.5	11
10. Baker	43	10
11. Morningside	42.5	9
12. Concordia (Neb.)	42	12
13. Missouri Baptist	32.5	12
14. Cumberlands (Ky.)	31	18
15. Northwestern	29	13
16. Dakota Wesleyan	26.5	14
17. Embry-Riddle	23	16
18. Shorter	20	17
18. William Penn	20	18
20. Indiana Tech	11.5	20

Others receiving votes: Menlo (Calif.) 9; Dickinson State (N.D.) 8; York (Neb.) 4.5; Waldorf (Iowa) 4.5; Bacone (Okla.) 1; Hastings (Neb.) 1.