Frontier Conference Women's Basketball Preview 2012

Skylights among many Frontier contenders

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Women's basketball in the Frontier Conference is as good as it gets in the NAIA.

Just last season, both Lewis-Clark State and Westminster College made deep runs in the NAIA national tournament, and that bodes well for future Frontier teams.

This season could be even better than last, because the Frontier has already seen MSU-Northern and UM-Western reemerge as powerhouse teams, while Rocky Mountain College and Montana Tech are also pushing for the top.

This will also be an interesting year in the Frontier because it’s the last season before Dickinson State University becomes a full member of the league. So by this time in 2013, things will look a lot different.

Here’s a breakdown of the Frontier Conference in its predicted order of finish.

Lewis-Clark State Warriors

2011-12 Record: 14-1
2010-11 Record: 11-3, 29-5
2011 Finish: 2nd, Frontier Postseason Champion

If it seems like forever that the Warriors, under 11th-year head coach Brian Orr have been on top of the Frontier, it only seems that way. LC State has went to the NAIA national tourney for six straight years. Don’t expect things to change this season. LC went to the NAIA Sweet 16 a year ago, and the Warriors return Frontier Player of the Year Jasmine Stohr, as well as a huge front line with seniors Kirsi Voshell (6-3) and Alyssa Fierro (6-2). But the Warriors aren’t just big, they shoot it well, they play great defense with their full-court pressure and they are deep. So there’s no question that the Frontier championship will go through Lewiston this season.

Westminster Griffins

2011-12 Record: 7-6
2010-11 Record: 12-2, 28-7
2011 Finish: 1st, Postseason runner up

The Griffins have won two straight regular season Frontier titles and went to five straight NAIA tournaments, including a run to last year’s Elite 8. But all that was under veteran head coach J.D. Gustin. Gustin left this season and Shelly Jarred of Salt Lake CC takes over the program. Things have been a little Rocky so far for the Griffins, but don’t expect anything less than a run at the league title. Westminster returns four starting guards, led by junior Nicole Yazzie, and the Griffins have added a pair of key post players. And they are still the premier 3-point shooting team in the NAIA, so it doesn’t look like Westminster will fall off this year.
Carroll College Saints

2011-12 Record: 7-6
2010-11 Record: 6-8, 21-12
2011 Finish: 5th

There’s a transition going on at Carroll too. The Saints have a new head coach in Rachelle Sayers, and Carroll has stumbled out of the gate, after a disappointing season a year ago. But the Saints got Tori Cahill back from an injury and they return star guard Alysha Green for her senior season. So they do have the talent in place to turn things around quickly.

Rocky Mountain Battlin’ Bears

2011-12 Record: 11-4
2010-11 Record: 7-7, 14-16
2011 Finish: 4th

The Bears were close to getting over the hump last season, and they might just do it this year. Head coach Brian Henderson, now in his 11th year, has a talented group led by guards Austin Hanser and Mickey Scally, as well as forward Callie Eike. Rocky is off to a great start and enters league play ranked No. 24 in the NAIA. And with their size and athleticism, the Bears could make a serious run at the Frontier title.

UM-Western Bulldogs

2011-12 Record: 10-3
2010-11 Record: 5-9, 9-18
2011 Finish: 6th

Western may have been the best nine-win team in the NAIA a year ago. And now, the Bulldogs are ready to go much further. Western is off to its best start in years under third-year head coach Cara Cochiarella, and a big reason why is the play of 6-3 center Hayley Pettit., who is averaging 15 points and 11 rebounds per game. The Bulldogs also have a star in sophomore Sammi Bignell as well as a host of talented shooters, and this could easily be the season when they return to Frontier prominence.

MSU-Northern Skylights

2011-12 Record: 13-1
2010-11 Record: 4-10, 13-18
2011 Finish: 7th

The Skylights were picked to finish sixth this season after suffering through a tough 2010-11 campaign. But Northern has come out of the gates like gangbusters, and it’s inexplicable that the Skylights aren’t ranked. Transfer guard Nikki Tresch and the steady, improved play of Kylee Denham have added to veterans Laramie Schwenke and Jordan Bruursema and now MSU-N is a legitimate threat to get back to the top of the Frontier standings. Once again, Northern will also be one of the top defensive teams in the Frontier and with the momentum the Skylights have built, it could be a special next two months in Havre.

Montana Tech Orediggers

2011-12 Record: 5-7
2010-11 Record: 8-6, 20-12
2011 Finish: 3rd
In just her fourth season in Butte, head coach Kerie DePell took the Orediggers to the NAIA national tournament a year ago. And though Tech is off to a rough start in 2011-12, the Digger’s won’t sneak up on anybody this season. Tech returns three starters, including forwards Kelsey DeWitt (6-2) and Dannielle Devenny (6-0). If Tech can get balanced play on the perimeter, the Diggers’ will have a chance to be right back in the mix this season.

Great Falls Argos

**2011-12 Record:** 4-7  
**2010-11 Record:** 3-11, 10-20  
**2011 Finish:** 8th

Over the last four seasons, the Argos have won just four league games, and three of those were last year. But second-year head coach Bill Himmelberg has a team that could change that this season. The Argos will still have an uphill battle playing in such a great league, but with returning guards Kezia Ford and Sara Sciacia joining forces with 6-3 center Kindra Jones, UGF won’t be an easy win for any opponent this season.