

Frontier Notebook: Frontier experiencing ebbs and flows

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Two weeks into the Frontier Conference men's and women's basketball season and already there's been major shake-ups.

On the men's side, the starts by the University of Great Falls, Westminster and Carroll College have been particularly surprising.

Great Falls was considered a Frontier contender after playing the University of Montana to a one-point loss in an exhibition game earlier this year in Missoula. But the Argos have lost three straight to open Frontier play, including losses to Montana Tech and UM-Western at home last weekend. Carroll has struggled after four players were lost for the year for either disciplinary or academic reasons, and Westminster has fallen from a ranking of No. 10 in the NAIA just three weeks ago to 1-2 in the Frontier and out of the NAIA Top 25.

Then there are teams on the rise. Rocky Mountain College is playing like a team with Frontier title aspirations, especially with the emergence of 6-9 sophomore Joel Barndt, who is among the NAIA leaders in rebounding this season. Tech is another much-improved squad as is Lewis-Clark State. The Warriors have finished below .500 in the Frontier for three straight seasons, but they have made big strides under first-year head coach Brandon Rinta.

On the women's side, Carroll has to be the biggest surprise thus far. The Saints have had two straight losing seasons in the conference, but each year have been picked to finish high. However, with the loss of Alysha Green to injury, Carroll is off to a shocking 0-3 start in league play.

Despite a 1-2 start to league play and an 7-9 overall record, Great Falls could be on the upswing. The Argos pushed Northern in Havre and upset UM-Western last Friday in Great Falls. UGF is talented and dangerous and the Argos appear to be the team no one wants to play from here on out. The biggest strides have been made in Dillon however. Yes, the Bulldogs suffered a setback in Great Falls, but with Hayley Pettit, Sammi Bignell and their up-tempo style, Western has shown the capability to be in the Frontier title race right to the end.

Injuries piling up

First it was Green at Carroll, then came even bigger news in Lewiston, Idaho.

Late last week, LC State announced that reigning Frontier MVP and two-time NAIA All-American Jasmine Stohr will miss at least six weeks with a knee injury. Stohr was averaging 22 points and seven rebounds per game for the nationally-ranked Warriors and was a front-runner for NAIA Player of the Year this season. Stohr's injury will certainly hurt the Warriors, and it's not known if she will play again this season.

The Skylights have also appeared to lose a key player to a knee injury. Late in last Saturday's loss to Western, guard Micah Kirkpatrick left the game with what appeared to be a serious knee injury. It isn't known at press time if Kirkpatrick, who scored a season-high 11 points against the Bulldogs, will return this season.

Defense and Milestones

It's been a big two weeks for the MSU-Northern men's team. Two weeks ago against Great Falls, Shaun Tatarka became the 17th Light to reach 1,000 points in a career. Then, last Saturday against Western, head coach Shawn Huse reached career win No. 200 at Northern.

Furthermore, the Lights moved up to No. 12 in the NAIA Top 25, which is the highest a Huse-coached team has ever been ranked. Northern also moved up to No. 1 in the NAIA this week in scoring defense. The Lights are allowing just 56 points per game, which is tops in the NAIA and of course, the Frontier.

Power Ranked

The Frontier Conference is trying to push teams up in the NAIA ratings. Despite sluggish starts to the season, both Westminster teams are getting NAIA respect. The Westminster women's team is ranked No. 21 in the NAIA this week, while the men are still receiving votes. Also on the upward trend is the UM-Western women, which received three votes in this week's poll, despite losing to UGF, as well as the Rocky Mountain College men, which received one vote in the men's poll. The Western men moved up one slot from No. 23 to No. 22, while the LC State women moved up to No. 6 from No. 7 this week. LC State swept its home games last week.