If anything has become abundantly clear so far during the Frontier Conference basketball season thus far, it’s that the league is going to take many more twists and turns before the postseason arrives late next month.

The clear indicator of that was this past weekend, especially on the men’s side.

Take the Great Falls Argos for example. They lost two players to academic issues and go and get beat on the road at Rocky Mountain College and Dickinson State two weeks ago. However, they return home a week later and beat Carroll College, and now first-place Westminster on last-second tip ins.

Meanwhile, the Griffins follow a heartbreaking loss at UGF last Friday by coming into the Armory Gymnasium and handing the nationally ranked Montana State University-Northern Lights just their third conference loss at home in the last three-plus seasons.

Then there’s Rocky. The Battlin’ Bears looked to be in control after opening the new year with home wins over Northern and UGF. However, a week later, the Bears lose an overtime game at Montana Tech, 100-91, then give up another 100 points in a blowout loss at Lewis-Clark State two nights later.

Now all of a sudden, it’s Westminster and LCSC as front-runners, while Northern and RMC, as well as UM-Western, which was picked to win the league title, who are back in the middle of the pack.

So if last weekend taught us anything about the Frontier, it’s that anything can and will happen, so don’t be surprised if there’s a new leader come this time next week.

Skylights Movin’ On Up

The new NAIA Women’s Coaches Poll was released on Tuesday afternoon, and the MSU-Northern Skylights rose three more spots. Northern is now ranked No. 15, the highest the team has been ranked since head coach Chris Mouat arrived in 2005.

And while rankings aren’t the goal, or the team’s focus, it does indicate that MSU-N is getting a healthy amount of respect from not only its Frontier peers, but the rest of the raters around the NAIA. MSU-N lost 60-46 to Westminster last Saturday, yet, the Skylights rose three spots in the new poll.

Still, Mouat knows that the ranking isn’t the focus, instead, he’s more concerned with this weekend’s road trip to Montana Tech and Carroll College.

“You can’t get too high or too low about these things, and our kids have done a really good job of staying on an even keel,” Mouat said. “They have really done a good job of focusing on nothing but the task at hand. The ranking is nice. I’m happy for our program, but I also know how good our league is, and any number of teams could hold that ranking right now. So our focus is on getting better. We want to keep improving and keep finding ways to win basketball games. That’s where our focus is right now.”

As focused as Northern is on winning, the Skylights have already done plenty of it. They’ve hung their hat on defense, as MSU-N is still the No. 1 defense in the NAIA, but they’ve also shot the ball very well, and they’re being led by committee. Six different Skylights have led the team in scoring this season, and currently, junior A’Jha Edwards is the only MSU-N player averaging more than 10 points per game.
Tough Times in Helena

It’s unusual, but both Carroll College basketball teams are struggling right now. For the Carroll men, growing pains under new head coach Carson Cunningham were to be expected. After all, Cunningham is trying to rebuild after a two-win 2012-2013 campaign in which Brandon Veltri was fired at the conclusion. And while the Saints are presently 0-5 in league play, they have certainly shown improvement. Carroll has played a multitude of close games this season, and it’s only a matter of time until the Saints start to trend upward.

The Carroll women are much more of a surprise. Picked to finish second in the Frontier, and coming off an NAIA national tournament appearance last spring, the Saints are off to a difficult 1-4 start in league play. Last Saturday typified Carroll’s season so far as the Saints blew a 15-point lead at UM-Western, and went on to lose to the Bulldogs 66-56.

It’s truly rarefied air when both the Carroll men and women have combined for just one victory, and we’re already three weeks into conference play.

Numbers Watch

Speaking of being three weeks into conference play, there have been some great performances around the league so far.

On the men’s side, UGF’s Marcel Towns and LCSC’s E.J. Farris are putting up big scoring numbers. Towns averages 22 points per game while Farris puts in 21 a night. Right behind them are Rocky’s Joel Barndt and Tech’s Adam Greger, who each average 19 per night. Northern’s leading scorer is senior Alfie Miller, who averages 15 points per game, and is shooting 41 percent from 3-point range.

On the women’s side, the UGF Argos might be struggling, but it isn’t for a lack of offense. Sophomore Erin Legel leads the league in scoring at 19 points per game, while teammate Lindsay Abramson is putting up 18 points per night. Interestingly, the tandem are multiple statistical leaders as well. Legel also leads the Frontier, averaging 7 assists per game, while Abramson is tops in the league with 12 rebounds per outing. She also recently broke the Frontier’s single-game scoring record, putting up 51 points at Rocky. MSU-N’s A’Jha Edwards is also averaging a double-double. She scores 12 points and averages 11 rebounds per game. Edwards pulled down a Frontier season-high 21 boards in the Skylights' big conference win over the UM-Western Bulldogs last Thursday night in Havre.