

NORTH DAKOTA ST BISON



POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

QUARTERBACKS - In '19 Trey Lance led the team in rushing with 1,100 (6.4, 13 td) and threw for 2,796 (67%) with a 28-0 ratio! He went on to be a first round pick by the 49ers. Iowa St transfer Zeb Noland was the heir apparent after being the backup in '19 (9-14-120-1-0). Noland only threw for 721 (51%) with a poor 5-6 ratio and was replaced by Cam Miller the last 3 games who threw for 363 (51%, 2-3). Miller was back they added Virginia Tech transfer Quincy Patterson (PS#42) to take the spot. Patterson is 6'4 240 and a big, powerful physical freak. He did only hit 14-37-257 in 2019 but rushed for 241 and was 7-10 in '20. While we didn't expect Trey Lance type numbers, we knew they would be significantly improved. Patterson started the first 7 games but was injured and Miller was inserted back into the starting lineup. Miller was extremely accurate, hitting 67.8% and led with 1,444 and a 14-3 ratio, 280 rush (4.1). This year Patterson (813, 54.5%, 6-4, 660 rush, 5.8) transferred to Temple. Miller was clearly the better passer of the two last year and he led them to a National Title. RFr Cole Payton (PS#207) was a heralded recruit in '21 and dressed for every game last year and could have a package created for him.

RUNNING BACKS - In 2019 they had to replace their top 2 RB and they had 3 RB's top 600 yards including Kobe Johnson (660, 7.7). In '20 they had to replace their top 2 again. Dominic Gonnella led with 495 (5.4). FB Hunter Luepke was #2 with 458 (5.5). Jalen Bussey was #3 with 395 (8.8). Johnson was injured and did not play the last 4 games and was #4 with 270 (4.4). The top 4 all returned last year and they added in SMU transfer TaMerik Williams (PS#74) so they were the most experienced at this spot in 3 years. Williams had 137 vs YSU and led with 773 (6.3). Johnson had 155 vs Indiana St on just 5 carries! He was #2 with 671 (6.4). FB Luepke had 543 (6.2) and also 165 rec (18.3). Gonnella started 8 games but missed the last 6 and had 380 (5.8). Bussey added 356 (7.6). TK Marshall had 236 (10.7). Of last year's top 8 rushers, the only one to depart this year is QB Patterson (#3, 660, 5.8). This is the deepest this unit has been in year's and one of their strongest positions.

RECEIVERS - In '19 3 of the top 4 receivers were back including the top guy Christian Watson (732, 21.5). 2019's #2 WR Phoenix Sproles (541, 16.4) DNP. Watson led with 437 (24.3!) with Josh Babicz #2 with 187 (11.7), Braylon Henderson #3 (1557, 22.4) and Jake Lippe #4 (102, 12.8). Last year they only lost Babicz but Sproles returned and their QB play was improved. Watson led again with 801 (18.6). Sproles was #2 but only with 284 (14.2). Babicz had 254 (21.2) and Noah Gindorff had 193 (11.4). Watson (#2DC GB) and Babicz depart this year. Five of their top 7 are back. They didn't

have to rely on this unit much last year with such a strong run game but it will be tough to replace a rare early draft pick.

OFFENSIVE LINE - In '19 NDSU returned 4 starters who were All Con/AA Candidates after the unit rushed for 288 (6.4) with 13 sacks. They actually regressed to 218 (5.1) with just 4.8% sacks. Last year they 4 starters again and this was the premier Oline in the FCS. Four OL started all 15 games and they rushed for 281 (6.2) with just 17 sacks (6.6%). This year 4 starters and their top backup return. They only lose 2nd Team AA RT Cordell Volson (15 st, #4DC CIN). LT Cody Mauch and LG Nash Jensen are both Preseason All MVFC and they are even more experienced than last year, making this the FCS' top Oline again.

DEFENSIVE LINE - In '19 NDSU allowed 136 (3.7) and had 42 sacks (10.8%). They allowed just 120 (3.4) in spring but sacks dropped to 26 (9.5%). Last year they returned DT Eli Mostaert (4.5 sk), DT Lane Tucker (3.5) and Spencer Waage (4.5 sk) who was 1st Team All-MVFC in preseason. They allowed just 88 rush ypg (2.9) and had 49 sacks (11.2%). They lose DT Lane Tucker (15 st, #9 tk'l'r, 3 sk), 4th Tm AA DE Brayden Thomas (13 st, #12 tk'l'r, 9 sk), NG Costner Ching (15 st, #14 tk'l'r, 2.5 sk) and DE Logan McCormick (11 st, #18 tk'l'r, 3 sk). While all 4 starters are gone, they do get Eli Mostaert back who was their top DL (#7 tk'l'r, 7.5 sk) but had 0 starts. They are still much less experienced and down a few notches.

LINEBACKERS - In '19 Jackson Hankey led with 127 tackles and Jasir Cox was #3 with 92 tackles while James Kaczor was #4. In spring Jackson Hankey (72 tkls), James Kaczor (70 tkls) and Jasir Cox (52 tkls) were their top 3 LB's and all 3 returned yet again last year. Hankey led for the 3rd straight season with 98 tackles while Cox was #3 with 58 tackles (3 tfl, 3 int). This year they lose their 3x leading tackler in Hankey (2nd Tm MVFC) and Cox (3rd Tm MVFC) transferred to WVU. Also gone is Mason Hofstedt (6 st, #10 tk'l'r). They do get back #4 tk'l'r Cole Wisniewski and Kaczor (#8 tk'l'r) but are less experienced after losing two 3-year starters.

DEFENSIVE BACKS - NDSU was #1 in '19 in the MVFC in pass D efficiency when they allowed just 139 pass ypg (56.2%, 11-17). In spring of '21 they actually fell to 5th in the MVC and gave up 186 pass ypg (56.3%, 19-10). SS Michael Tutsie was 3rd Team Preseason All-MVFC last year and NDSU was back in their normal #1 spot, allowing 177 pass ypg (57.4%, 12-14). This year NDSU returns the ENTIRE secondary in tact. Tutsie is a 2nd Team FCS All-American. Jayden Price is a shutdown CB. Dawson Weber had 4 int's last year. Courtney Eubanks led with 6 pbu's. This is the strength of the defense and the best secondary in the FCS.

SPECIAL TEAMS - In '19 kicker Jake Reinholz made 6 of 8 fg's (L/42) with 1 miss from 50. P Garrett Wegner had a super 46.1 average and a 42.2 net. Christian Watson had a 33.8 average on 10 KR's with 2 td's and they had two who combined for 26.5 average on 10 PR's! Last year they lost P Wegner. Reinholz made 16-21 fg's (L/46). Kaedin Steindorf couldn't match Wegner's superb leg and only averaged 40.2 ypp (35.8 net). Jayden Price averaged 13.3 PR (1 td) but Raja Nelson and Watson were a far cry from the year prior with 22.8 KR. This year Reinholz departs. Steindorf returns but he will need to be much better or this unit is average at best.

COACHES - Matt Entz is in his fourth year as HC at NDSU. He has led the Bison to two national titles in 3 years with a 37-4 record and is the 2x MVFC COY and 2x AFCA FCS COY. He was the DC here from '14-'18 and was also DC at Western Illinois in '13. The 4th year OC is Tyler Roehl. He coached TE/FB's here from '14-'18. 4th year DC David Braun was ST Coor at Northern Iowa in '18 and DL Coach at UC Davis in '15-'16. Kody Morgan is the ST/S's Coach and has been here since '16.

FORECAST

OFFENSE - From '11-'15 NDSU averaged at least 31 ppg but in '16 NDSU had a dip, averaging just 29 ppg and 408 ypg. They got back on track in '17 when they put up 39 ppg and 450 ypg then peaked in '18 when they put up 41 ppg and 472 ypg. With Trey Lance at QB the Bison averaged 37 ppg and 470 ypg but he departed as a first round draft pick and they fell back below 30 ppg in the spring season with 26 ppg and 342 ypg. Improved QB play and a dominant run game helped the Bison put up 34 ppg and 432 ypg last year. They have 8 starters back this year including QB Cam Miller, their entire RB unit and 4 starting OL. They do have to replace a #2DC WR and a #4DC OL but they are more experienced and could top 35 ppg this year.

DEFENSE - In '18 NDSU allowed 13 ppg and 289 ypg. Their defense held opponents 122 ypg below their average which was #1 in the FCS. They were even better in '19 when they allowed 12 ppg and 275 ypg although they "dropped" to #2 in the FCS, allowing 102 ypg less than their foes averaged. In spring they allowed 19 ppg and 306 ypg. Last year they brought back their top 3 LB's, their top DB and 3 preseason All-MVFC DL. They allowed just 11 ppg and 265 ypg while holding foes 110 ypg below their average (#3 in FCS). They essentially have 6 starters back this year and 6 of their top 8 tacklers return. The secondary is loaded and once again this will be one of the top defenses in the FCS.

2022 - North Dakota St has won 9 of the last 11 National Titles, making them one of the most dominant programs in all of college sports. Their last 2 Head Coaches (Craig Bohl) and Chris Klieman) both have been successful since moving to the FBS at Wyoming and Kansas St. Klieman left after they won the Nat'l Title in '18 so DC Matt Entz took over and led the Bison to the National Title in '19, going 16-0 and they were +195 ypg and +217 vs MVFC foes. Only 2 of their games were decided by 7 points or less. The spring season was a letdown as the Bison had their 39 game winning streak end at Southern Illinois in a shocking 24 point loss. They won their next 4 but lost their first home game since '16 to South Dakota St. They still made the playoffs but were bounced in the 2nd round by eventual Nat'l Champion Sam Houston St 24-20 and finished 7-3 (+36 ypg). Last year they had much better QB play. They started 8-0 but lost to SD St again. NDSU dominated the next 4 games then beat James Madison 20-14 in the FCS Semi-Finals. In the Nat'l Title NDSU led 28-0 at half and 35-0 3Q. They won 38-10 with a 506-335 yard edge. NDSU has won their last 6 against FBS foes (5-0 vs P5) and travels to Arizona week 3. The Bison host South Dakota St on 10/15 with double-revenge on their mind. 14 starters return and this is once again not only the class of the Missouri Valley but also will be the #1 team in the FCS Preseason Polls and clear favorites to win the National Title.