

CENTRAL ARKANSAS

POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

QUARTERBACKS - QB Breylin Smith was an FCS All-American in '19 (3704, 64%, 32-16). Smith started 8 games in '20 for UCA and he threw for 1,861 yds (56%, 19-10) while Luke Hales made 1 start and overall threw for 345 yds (65%, 2-2). Hales departed coming into LY but Smith returned with 6,652 career pass yds (4th all-time at UCA) and 58 career TD's (4th all-time at UCA). Smith again had a productive season as he threw for 2,884 yards (64.7%, 26-10) and was 1st Tm ASUN. Darius Bowers was the backup and was 10-20 for 133 yds (1-1 ratio). The bad news for UCA is that Smith is gone this season, and he leaves UCA as the #2 all-time passer (9536 yds) and #2 all-time in td passes (84). They also lose backup QB Bowers, so there is no experience back at QB. UCA adds former FBS QB Clifton McDowell (Louisiana) as well as former Northern Iowa QB Will McElvain, who set the Missouri Valley Football Conference passing record for a freshman (2,778 yds) in 2019 and comes to UCA with 4,064 career pass yds. We feel better about this position with exp'd additions, but they have big shoes to fill replacing the #2 all-time passer.

RUNNING BACKS - Kierre Crossley led UCA in '20 with 596 rush yds (9 st, 5.2, 4 td), but he departed last season, but returning at RB for UCA was Cameron Myers (263, 4.0) and Marshun Douglas (125, 6.2). However, Myers and Douglas combined for 41 rush yards LY and it was freshman RB Darius Hale who took over as the lead RB and ran for a team-best 1015 yards (5.1, 17 td) and was 1st Tm ASUN. Trysten Smith (290, 4.8) and Kylin James (221, 7.6) both were quality backups and they both return this season along with Hale and we see the Bears having an even better season running the ball.

RECEIVERS - The leading receiver in 2020 for UCA was Tyler Hudson (9 st, 845, 16.9, 7 td) and the #2 receiver was Lujan Winningham (9 st, 522, 14.1, 12 td) while Mitchell Perkinson was the #3 receiver with 268 yds (L/5 sts, 9.6). The top 7 receivers all returned for UCA last season and with QB Smith back we thought this unit would take another step up. Hudson was the top receiver again (11 st, 1424, 20.0, 8 td) and was 2nd Tm AA! Winningham was again the #2 receiver (9 st, 840, 15.8, 5 td). UCA loses both Hudson (transfer Louisville) and Winningham (UFA Jacksonville) both are gone this season as are Tobias Enlow (188, 9.9) and Perkinson (158, 6.3). Only one of the top five WR's returns this season & that is Christian Richmond (342, 11.0, 6 td). They also lose starting TE Sam Camargo (11 st). UCA adds a handful of transfer WR's including former Colorado, Arkansas and Minnesota WR's, but with 4 of the top 5 gone & a new QB under center this unit likely won't match their numbers from a season ago.

OFFENSIVE LINE - The OLine paved the way for 114 ypg (3.8) and they allowed 20 sks, but only gave up 3 sks in the L/3 games in the 2020 season. Last season the Bears returned 6 players who started multiple games along the OLine incl 4 starters with the most notable returnees being LT Jaylin Hendrix and C Toby Sanderson. The biggest loss on the OLine was a starting LG. The Bears did improve their rushing totals last season as the OLine paved the way for 142 ypg (4.2) and gave up 23 sacks, with 8 of those coming in the final 2 games. This unit does lose long-time C Sanderson (44 career starts) who was 1st Tm ASUN last season. UCA also loses 3rd Tm ASUN LG Jaden Salley (11 st LY). Returning this year is RG Hendrix (33 career st) and RT Justin Lairy (16 career st) who were both 1st Tm ASUN and Hendrix was 3rd Tm AA! 3rd Tm LT BK Collier (11 st LY) is back too. With 3 starters back this unit has a solid foundation and they bring in a pair of transfers. If the two new starters are able to gel quickly, this unit should still be able to open up running lanes & protect the QB.

DEFENSIVE LINE - The DLine in '20 was led by DE Logan Jessup (3 st, 37 tkl, 6.5 sk, 4.5 tfl) along with DE JW Jones (9 st, 35 tkl, 3.5 sk) and NG A'Javius Brown (9 st, 21 tkl, 5.5 tfl) & they allowed 163 rush ypg (4.0) and did collect 27 sks including 9 in one game again Missouri St. Last season 6 of the top 7 DL's returned including all 4 starters. The run defense allowed 160 rush ypg (4.7) but in their last 4 games vs FCS foes they gave up 222 rush ypg (5.6). Overall they allowed 168 rush ypg (4.8) but only collected 19 sacks. Jessup led the DLine with 60 tkl (5 sk, 6 tfl) and was 1st Tm ASUN, while Caden Brown had 39 tkl (8 st, 3 tfl) and Jones finished with 29 tkl (11 st, 2 sk). This season Jones (3rd Tm ASUN) departs along with A. Brown (11 st, 15 tkl, 3.5 tfl). Jessup and C. Brown (2nd Tm ASUN) both return, along with Jalen Bedell (3 st, 21 tkl, 4 tfl). UCA also adds a trio of JUCO's on the DLine and they could make an impact in '22. Overall this unit should remain solid, though they will have to work to try and increase their sack totals this season.

LINEBACKERS - UCA's LB corps in '20 was led by Dre Matthews (7 st, 43 tkl, 5 tfl) along with TJ Campbell (3 st, 41 tkl, 2.5 sk, 4.5 tfl) and Darin Davenport (8 st, 31 tkl, 5 tfl). Last season Matthews departs along with NB Davis Harrison (L/5 sts, 35 tkl, 1.5 tfl, 3 pbu) but Campbell and Davenport return & overall 4 of the top 5 LB's were back. NB Deandre Lamont was the #2 tackler (11 st, 63 tkl, 8 pbu, 2 int) and was 1st Tm ASUN, while Trenton Dunn was the #3 tackler (7 st, 62 tkl, 3 tfl, 2nd Tm ASUN) and TJ Campbell was the #8 tackler (11 st, 32 tkl, 2.5 tfl, 2nd Tm ASUN). This unit takes a big hit, as Lamont, Dunn, and Campbell all depert this season and the top returnee is Darin Davenport (4 st, 31 tkl, 2.5 tfl). With 4 of the top 5 tacklers gone this unit needs some new names to step up this season.

DEFENSIVE BACKS - Last season the pass defense for the Bears did improve slightly as they allowed 225 pass ypg and allowed opposing QB's to hit 57% for the season. The secondary was led by S Cameron Godfrey (9 st, 51 tkl, 2 int) along with CB Deandre Lamont (9 st, 39 tkl, 5 pbu, 2 int) and Nick Nakwaasah (9 st, 33 tkl, 2 pbu) & these 3 players all returned. The lone starter gone from the UCA secondary was a CB (7 sts, 27 tkl's, 3 pbu's). The Bears pass defense last season allowed 229 pass ypg (56.7%) and collected 10 int's. S TaMuarion Wilson led UCA with 66 tackles (8 st, 3.5 tfl, 4 pbu), while S Godfrey was the #6 tackler (7 st, 37 tkl, 4 pbu) and Christian Cain was the #7 tackler (8 st, 33 tkl). All three safeties who started LY return in 2022 along with CB Nathan Page (F/5 st, 11 tkl, 2 pbu) but they do lose CB's Willie Langham (9 st, 29 tkl, 2 pbu), Wesley Anusiem (6 st, 25 tkl, 5 pbu) and Nakwaasah (1 st, 11 tkl). The S's will be solid, but the CB position is a bit of a ? entering the season.

SPECIAL TEAMS - Kicker Hayden Ray hit 12-16 fg's in 2020 with a L/47 yds & he returned last season for the Bears and went just 2-7 on fg's (L/32). The main P for UCA in 2020 was Seren Hughes-Ford, who avg'd 39.2 yds per punt (L/63), but overall the team had a net of just 33 yds. Hughes-Ford returned last season and he averaged 41.4 yards per punt on 22 attempts (L/61). Chandler Caughron had 27 punts last season, with a 41.4 average (L/64) but the team net was only 33.8 yards. WR Richmond was the only KR last season and had 510 yards (28.3) while UCA averaged 8.7 yards per punt return. This unit loses P Hughes-Ford and PR Tyler Hudson, but everyone else is back. UCA needs K Ray to have an improved season, and they also need to work on improving their net punt average if this unit is to have any improved success in 2022.

COACHES - Nathan Brown enters year #5 as the HC at Central Arkansas. Brown has been involved with the UCA program since 2004 when he was a player. Brown was the QB here from 2004-08 and still holds the record for career pass yards (10,558), pass td's (100), and completions (856). From 2009-2013 Brown was the QB coach here and in 2014 he added the role of offensive coordinator and has

been the HC since 2018. The 5th year OC is Ken Collums, who played QB here from 1991-94 and coached here previously from 2000-04 with the final 3 seasons serving as the OC. He was also the HC at Abilene Christian from 2012-16. The new DC is Matt Kitchens, who previously coached here under from 2015-17 as the S coach & was the S coach at South Alabama from 2018-2020. Keith Scott is the ST coordinator for the Bears.

FORECAST

OFFENSE - UCA's offense in '17 averaged a decade-best 465 ypg and scored 36 ppg. The offense took a bit of a dip '18 as just 4 starters returned and the Bears averaged 409 ypg and 31 ppg. In 2019 the offensive numbers again took a dip down to 382 ypg and 28 ppg. In 2020 UCA was held to under 300 yds in 4 of their first 6 games and for the season they only averaged 363 ypg but did put up 32 ppg. Last season they returned 9 starters and the offense took a jump to 422 ypg and 34 ppg. This season they lose their #2 all-time passer, 4 of their top 5 WR's, and 2 starting OL and a drop is likely in store for the UCA offense in '22.

DEFENSE - The UCA defense allowed just 319 ypg and 18 ppg in '17, but those numbers jumped up in '18 as the Bears gave up 406 ypg, 26 ppg. In 2019 the Bears defense remained about the same as they allowed 404 ypg and gave up 28 ppg. In 2020 the Bears defense had some ups and downs during the season, but overall gave up 387 ypg and 29 ppg. This defense in 2021 returned 8 starters but allowed 397 ypg, and if you removed the 150 yds allowed to Texas Wesleyan they allowed 422 ypg vs 10 FCS/FBS foes. This season UCA returns just 4 starters on defense, but 6 of their top 9 tacklers are back so this unit could still have a decent season.

2022 - Central Arkansas has only been an FCS team since 2007, but have had their fair share of success since making the jump. The Bears have made the FCS playoffs 5 times in the past 10 seasons with their last trip coming in 2019 where they lost to Illinois St. Despite making the playoffs 5 times, UCA has never advanced past the 2nd round. UCA was a member of the Southland Conference from 2006-2020 and won at least a share of the conference title 4 times, but moved to the Atlantic Sun last season. UCA opens with Missouri St at home but then plays 3 straight road games. UCA only has 4 home games in 2022 and they face both Kennesaw St and SF Austin on the road too. UCA only brings back 9 starters this season and must replace a talented QB and their top two receivers. HC Brown has done a good job here (25-19) but after just going 5-6 LY with a more talented roster, they will have to win a couple tough road games if they are to finish 2022 with a winning season.