

ARKANSAS PINE-BLUFF GOLDEN LIONS

POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

QUARTERBACKS - Skyler Perry won the starting QB job as a freshman and threw for 1,683 (58.6%, 8-4) while adding 188 rush (3.5). In '19 he lost the job to Shannon Patrick who threw for 2,250 (62.8%, 19-13) while Perry added 784 (53.6%, 8-4). They lost Patrick in the spring but Perry took his game to another level. He averaged 247.2 ypg through the air while also leading the team in rushing (216, 4.2). Of rushers with at least double-digit attempts on the year, Perry was the only player on the team to average over 4.0 ypc. Perry threw for 1,236 (57.3%, 13-6). Last year Perry returned as a 2 year starter but put together by far his worst season. He threw for 1,786 but only completed 50.3% with a 6-9 ratio. He did rush for 398 (4.2). Perry returns again this year while backup QB Xzavier Vaughn (380, 51%, 3-4) departs. They lack depth and experience behind Perry but JUCO transfer Mekhi Hagens (6'3" 200 So) and Jalen Macon (6'5" 205 So) could get a chance if he doesn't play better early.

RUNNING BACKS - The Golden Lions had to replace a 2x 1,000 yard rusher in the spring. Mattias Clark had just 173 (2.8) and Omar Allen had 150 (3.6). Both were back last year but Allen had just 4 carries in 6 games and Clark never played. Kierre Crossley emerged as the top rusher. He had 481 (4.3, 106 rec). Kayvon Britten had 231 (3.9). No other RB topped 100 yards. This year Crossley departs. Britten is a smaller back at 5'7" 190. They add Josh Edwards from Arkansas St who had 7 carries in 2 years for the Red Wolves. This unit lacks experienced depth but they are in better shape with their top back returning.

RECEIVERS - Ark Pine-Bluff had an experienced WR corps heading into last year. Josh Wilkes was #3 in '19 with 447 (14.4). In spring he led with 341 (13.6). Dejuan Miller was #2 in '19 with 779 (18.1) and added 148 (10.6) in spring. Tyrin Ralph had 283 (10.5) in '19 and added 307 (12.8) in spring. They did have to replace Harry Ballard who led in '19 with 9838 (18.0) and was #2 in spring with 313 (13.6). Last year Wilkes led with 522 (12.7). Dalyn Hill was #2 with 331 and led with a 19.5 ypc. Trey Harrell had 294 (11.3). Daemon Hawkins added 287 (16.9). This year they lose 6 of their top 7 in Wilkes (11 st), Hill (2 st), Harrell (11 st), Miller (9 st, 239, 10.9), Ralph (166, 11.1) and Kierre Crossley (106, 8.2). This group needs completely rebuilt. They added JUCO transfer Daishawn Brimage (PS#421, Orig Akron). They go from experienced to inexperienced but none of their WR's were All SWAC last year so they aren't as down as one would expect.

OFFENSIVE LINE - The Golden Lions saw their rush production increase significantly in '18 when they rushed for 187 ypg and only allowed 10 sacks. Their rush ypg dropped 3 straight years after that, avg 161 (4.3, 18 sk) ypg then just 112 (3.2, 6 sk) in spring. Last year they had 3 All-SWAC preseason honorees including LT Mark Evans (1st Tm). They improved to 126 rush ypg (4.0) but allowed 25 sacks (7.1%). This year 3 starters return including 1st Tm All-SWAC LT Evans. They do lose 4th Tm All SWAC C Eric Jones (10 st) and LG Anthony Williams. They should be better coming off a full season and we consider this a strength.

DEFENSIVE LINE - This unit hit rock bottom in '18 when they allowed 260 rush ypg (6.8). In '19 they made a massive improvement, allowing 144 rush ypg (3.8) and had 26 sacks (6.9%). They got even better in spring, allowing just 106 (3.2) with 21 sacks (10.8%) in just 5 games! Last year they lost their top DE who led with 16.5 tfl's in '19. They fell to 177 rush ypg allowed (4.4) and only had 23 sacks in 11 games (6.6%). The Golden Lions lose Kailon Davis (1 st, #16 tkl'r, 6 tfl), Zion Farmer (10 st, #17 tkl'r, 4 tfl), DeCarlo Hamilton (2 st, #19 tkl'r, 3 tfl) and Jacari McKinney (8 st, 12 tkl). They return 4 of their top 8 including JaVonn Gray (4 st, #12 tkl'r, 2.5 sk) and Athen Smith (10 st, #15 tkl'r, 3.5 sk, 3 tfl). With 4 of their top 8 back they are less experienced but are also coming off a disappointing season.

LINEBACKERS - Kobe Watts and Isaac Peppers were All-SWAC in spring when they finished as Ark PB's #1 and #2 tacklers. Both came back last year and Watts finished as their #2 tackler and Peppers finished #5. Monroe Beard emerged as their top tackler with 78, and also led with 5 sacks and was named 3rd Team All-SWAC. Timon Atkins was their #3 tackler and led with 9.5 tfl's, on his way to 4th Team All SWAC honors. This year they lose Watts (11 st, #2 tkl'r, 2.5 sk, 3.5 tfl) and NB Paul Reeves (9 st, #11 tkl'r). They return their #1, #3, #5 and #20 tacklers. Depth is a slight concern but this is the strength of the defense.

DEFENSIVE BACKS - In '19 Ark Pine-Bluff was #4 in the SWAC in pass D efficiency (58.6%, 15-11). The Golden Lions came back in the spring and allowed 258 ypg but only 54.4% (10-8) and moved up to 3rd in pass D efficiency. Jalon Thigpen was 1st Team All-SWAC in the spring after finishing with 5 int's. He returned and was their #4 tkl'r but finished with 0 int's. They slipped to dead last in the SWAC in pass D efficiency, allowing 282 ypg (61.6%, 36-7). This year they lose S Thigpen (8 st, #4 tkl'r, 3 pbu, 3 tfl), S Stanleigh Bentley (1 st, #7 tkl'r, 5 pbu), CB Andre Fuller (11 st, #9 tkl'r, 14 pbu, 3 int!), S Keyvi Johnson (7 st, #10 tkl'r) and Lawson Howard (3 st, 7 tkl). Only 3 of their top 9 tacklers at DB return but they can't get much worse than last year so they only have one way to go.

SPECIAL TEAMS - Ark PB WR Tyrin Ralph was a 2nd Team All-American in spring when he averaged 14.9 yds per return. Zac Piwniczka made 12-17 fg's (L/45). Josh Sanchez returned at punter and averaged 40.1 ypp. Their team net was just 32.7. Dejuan Miller averaged 12.6 PR and Tyrin Ralph averaged 23.3 KR. This year they lose their kicker and Ralph is gone as well. This was an average unit in the kicking game but needs to replace their top return man.

COACHES - Doc Gamble enters his 3rd season as Head Coach at Arkansas Pine-Bluff. He spent 3 years as QB Coach and asst head coach before being promoted. Gamble spent 5 years as a WR coach at Kent State prior to coming here. Former Miami RedHawks head coach Don Treadwell is the 3rd year OC. He was DB Coach at Michigan State in '18 then WR's coach in '19. He was OC at Kent St from '15-'17. Thomas Sims and Jeff Burrow are the Co-DC's. Sims was hired at Savannah St in '18 and promoted to DC in '19. Sims also coached in the Big 10 for 8 seasons. Jeff Burrow is in his first year here and coached at Buffalo last year.

FORECAST

OFFENSE - In '16 Arkansas Pine-Bluff put up just 12 ppg and 308 ypg. They improved by over a td in '17, putting up 21 ppg and 301 ypg and against SWAC foes they averaged 24 ppg and 313 ypg. The Golden Lions made an incremental improvement in '198, averaging 25 ppg and 423 ypg. They also averaged 7 ypg more than their foes allowed on average. '19 saw Ark Pine-Bluff make another decent jump, putting up 32 ppg and 444 ypg. They put up 20 ypg more than their foes allowed on average. They made yet another improvement in spring, averaging 35 ppg and 363 ypg. After 4 straight seasons of improvement they finally tumbled, allowing 20 ppg and 323 ypg. Their offense put up 72 ypg less than what their foes allowed on average. Only 4 starters return this year. QB Perry will be throwing to a young receiver corps but the Oline and RB's have experience and we wouldn't be surprised if they improve off last year's low benchmark.

DEFENSE - In '18 Ark Pine-Bluff was dead last in the SWAC in total defense and scoring defense. They allowed 43 ppg and 558 ypg. In the spring they made a 2 td improvement, allowing 28 ppg but only 364 ypg. Last year the experienced defense allowed 38 ppg and 454 ypg. They allowed foes to put up 91 ypg more than their season average. Only 2 starters return this year and they lose 7 of their top 11 tacklers. They still could improve but the pass D was rough last year and they didn't add any big pieces in the portal so this D will again be towards the bottom of the concert.

2022 - Ark Pine-Bluff had back-to-back 2 win seasons in '18 and '19 when they were -135 ypg in both seasons. In '19 they started 3-1 with the loss coming at TCU. After a 24 point loss to Southern then they won back-to-back games including a 32 point win over MVSU. They suffered 3 straight losses but won their finale to finish 6-5, though 2 of their wins came over DII foes. They finished +71 ypg and +82 in the SWAC. They won their first 4 games in the spring season, reaching the SWAC Title Game for the first time since 2012. Unfortunately they blew a 26-18 halftime lead to lose 40-33. The Golden Lions finished -1 ypg despite the 4-1 record and 3 of their 4 wins came by 7 or less. Last year they lost their first 7 vs FCS foes with only 1 of those losses by single-digits. After upsetting Grambling at home they lost their last 2 in blowout fashion to finish 2-9 and they were -131 ypg and -146 in SWAC play. This year they only get 6 starters back! They do have QB Skyler Perry back but he is playing with an all new WR corps. The Golden Lions open with 2 lower division schools then travel to Oklahoma St. They drop 2 of the 3 teams in the SWAC East that finished with a winning record last year, but they do miss Jackson St. The Golden Lions get 4 home games and a neutral site game in St Louis vs Alabama A&M. Their home game against Texas Southern is winnable but the rest of their most winnable games are on the road. They should easily top their 2 win total from last year with this schedule but are still going to finish near the bottom of the SWAC West.