

# BUCKNELL BISON

## POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

**QUARTERBACKS** - Jared Bitikofer started 5 in '18, throwing for 1,050 (55%, 7-8) but missed the L/3 with an inj. He returned in '19 along with 2 others with starting experience. Bitikofer started 8 in '19, throwing for 1,686 (57.4%, 10-6). John Chiarolanzio got 2 starts and threw for 399 (43.7%, 0-4) and Tarrin Earle threw for 98 (46.9%). Bitikofer then threw for 606 (58.2%) during their spring season but had a 2-7 ratio. Earle threw for 209 (69.0%, 2-0). Bitikofer departed last year. Earle started the opener but was injured and missed the rest of the season. Nick Semptimphelter started 3 games and led with 611 (51.4%, 3-4). Ethan Grady started the last 5, threw 8 int's to just 3 td's and was #2 with 570 (51.3%). Tyler Beverett started 2, hit just 36.4% (117, 0-1). Bucknell's 4 starting QB's combined to hit just 49.2% with a 6-13 ratio. This year they return everyone but Earle. QB play has been a struggle at Bucknell. They have plenty of experience but until someone steps up then this unit is at the bottom of the Patriot.

**RUNNING BACKS** - In '19, 2nd Tm All-Patriot RB Jared Cooper returned (525, 3.3, 287 '18) and they got '17's leading rusher, Chad Freshnock back from injury. Freshnock led with 459 (4.1) and Cooper was #2 with 382 (4.4, 106 rec). Cooper returned in spring and had 115 (3.5). He returned in the fall and Coleman Bennett (97, 2.8 spg) as back as well. Cooper led with just 312 (3.1). Rushawn Baker had the best ypc of their RB's at just 3.7. Danny Meuser had 151 (3.5) and Bennett was #4 with 112 (2.5). This year they lose Cooper but the rest of the unit returns in tact. Three are back that topped 100 yards last year but they are down without their all conference running back.

**RECEIVERS** - The Bison returned 3 of their top 5 receivers in '19. Dominic Lyles led with 579 (16.1) and Brandon Sanders wasn't far behind with 530 (9.1). John McGuire added 248 (8.5) and Connor Holmes had 234 (7.5). Lyles and Sanders both performed well in their spring season with 291 (9.4) and 264 (11.5) respectively. Lyles and Holmes returned in the fall while Sanders, McGuire and TE Alex Twiford (15 st 2Y) all departed. Only 3 of their top 8 were back from '19 and to make matters worse, Lyles missed 4 games with injury/illness. Frosh WR Marques Owens led with just 241 (10.9). Lyles was #2 with 12.6. No other WR topped 200 yards. The only loss this year is Lyles (7 st). 8 with starting experience return. This is another experienced unit that hasn't had much success.

**OFFENSIVE LINE** - Bucknell hasn't topped 100 rush ypg since '16. In '19 Bucknell returned 4 starters and had 7 with starting experience. The Bison ran for just 83 ypg (2.7, 29 sk) but that was actually an improvement from '18. They slipped to 62 (2.0, 9 sk) in spring. 13 different OL started between '19 and '20. Three starters returned from '19 and 7 had starting experience in the spring but they suffered a huge loss when team captain Grayson Cherubino was injured in camp (OFY). Bucknell finished '21 with 71 ypg (2.3, 24 sk). This year 4 starters return. They only lose LG Jack Wall (11 st) and bkp OG Michael Killiri (3 st). This year 4 starters return and they have 7 back with starting experience. They should be much better if they can avoid any major injuries. This unit is anchored by 3rd Tm All-Patriot LT Ethan Pitzel (10 st) and if they can avoid major injuries then they are going to be much better and just maybe reach 100 rush ypg.

**DEFENSIVE LINE** - Bucknell returned all 3 Dline starters in '19. They shut down their conference foes, allowing just 96 (2.5) ypg but allowed 236 rush ypg (6.2) in 4 non-conference games. Overall they allowed 160 rush ypg (4.2) and sacks jumped to 37. They played 4 conference foes in spring and only allowed 79 rush ypg (2.8, 13 sk). Last year they lost their #8, #9, #10 and #13 tkl'rs. Only 1 starter returned and they had just 2 of their top 7 back. The Bison were equally bad against the run vs conference and non-conference foes alike. They allowed 242 (5.6) rush ypg and had just 13 sacks. This year they only lose DT Ryan Betz (5 st, 9 tkl) and Luke Hamper (1 st, 3 tkl). They get their top 6 back so they are much more experienced. Prior to last year this was often one of the best run D's in the Patriot and we think they could have a huge improvement.

**LINEBACKERS** - The Bison returned their #4, #6, #8 and #18 tkl'rs at LB in '19 but the overall defensive performance slipped. Two LB's started all 16 games between '19 and spring. The other started from the 4th game of '19 on. Last year they lost Rick Mottram (#1 tkl'r, 8 tfl, 2 int '19), Gerrit Van Itallie (#2 tkl'r, 12 tfl, 6 pd '19), Simeon Page (#5 tkl'r, 13 sk 2Y) and Sam Chitty (3 st, 9 tkl '19). All 3 starters from both '19 and spring were gone so this unit needed completely rebuilt. NB Brent Jackson led the way last year with 76 tkl's and Ben Allen was right behind him with 75. This year both return along with #4 tkl'r Ben Leake and #6 tkl'r Tyler Alston. They go from zero experience to their top 4 all returning, making this their most improved unit.

**DEFENSIVE BACKS** - Bucknell had just 1 starter back and finished dead last in Patriot League pass efficiency D in '19 (65.6%, 29-8) but they were actually 3rd against Patriot foes (63.7%, 5-6). Last year they lost SS Conner Romango (#4 tkl'r) and FS Brandon Benson (#3 tkl'r). Two starters returned and they were in much better shape than they were entering '19. The Bison finished dead last again in pass efficiency D by allowing league highs of 63.9% completions, 18 td's and a league low 4 int's. This year they lose CB Sterling Deary (8 st, #11 tkl'r, 2 pd) and Micah Dennis (5 st, 16 tkl, 2 pd). They get their #3, #4, #10, #12, #14 and #15 tkl'rs back. Five are back with starting experience and we are calling for the Bison to get out of the basement in PDR.

**SPECIAL TEAMS** - Ethan Torres made just 6-12 fg's in '19 (L/38) but hit all 5 fg's in spring (L/39). Alex Pechin avg'd 47.3 ypp (43.4 net) but he was gone in spring and Ruben Anderson averaged just 33.2 (32.8 net). Bucknell avg'd 5.7 PR and 15.2 KR in '19 but did improve to 7.7 PR and 21.5 KR in spg. Last year they lost Torres. Anderson improved to 37.2 avg but his net stayed the same. Ryan Schatzel made 5-6 fg's (L/45). This year both Schlatzel and Anderson return.

**COACHES** - Dave Cecchini was the Patriot League Spring COY in '21. He was hired in February of 2019 and previously spent 5 years as head coach at Valparaiso and was OC at other prestigious academic institutions, Lehigh, The Citadel and Harvard where he coached future NFL QB Ryan Fitzpatrick. Jason Miran is the 3rd year OC who followed Cecchini from Valpo where he spent 4 years as WR coach. DC Chris Bowers was hired this past February. He spent 3 seasons as DC at

Eastern Illinois. He was Director of Player Personnel at Northwestern from '11-'18. Colin Schaeffer is the 1st year ST's Coordinator.

## FORECAST

**OFFENSE** - In '18 Bucknell fell to just 13.4 ppg and 227 ypg. They brought in HC Cecchini, who has an OC background and took Holy Cross from 16 ppg in his first year to 30 ppg in his 3rd year. Bucknell averaged just 16 ppg and 281 ypg in '19 then put up 18 ppg and 268 ypg in spring ball. Last year 8 starters were back from their spring season. They lost their QB and best OL by the 2nd game and things spiraled out of control. Bucknell averaged just 9.5 ppg and 192 ypg. 8 starters return. They have 3 different QB's who have started, 5 of their top 6 WR's and 8 OL who started at least 1 game last season. The experience helps and they hit rock bottom last year.

**DEFENSE** - In '17 Bucknell held foes to just 295 ypg. They returned 6 starters in '18 and they slipped to allowing 389 ypg and 28.3 ppg. In '19 they had 6 starters back again but slipped further to 424 ypg and 32.5 ppg allowed but only gave up 19 ppg and 320 ypg in Patriot League play. They held their first 2 opponents in spring to just 13 total points then gave up 31 & 33 in their last 2 which was a sign of things to come. The Bison only had 2 starters back from '19 last year. They allowed 37.9 ppg and 451 ypg and were actually worse in Patriot League play (40 ppg/469 ypg). This was once a dominant defense. They've got 10 starters back. Their top 10 tacklers all return (15 of top 16 are back). We wouldn't be surprised if this once proud defense improves by at least a full touchdown this season.

**2022** - Dave Cecchini took over as head coach at Bucknell in '19 after spending 4 years as HC at Valpo, where he had a similar rebuilding experience after Valpo had won just 3 games in 4 years. After going 9-24 in his first 3 years at Valpo, they were picked to finish 10th in the Pioneer by the Media and finished tied for third, and their 5 league wins were the most since 1961. After going 8-2 in '14, Bucknell had won 4, 4 and 5 games from '15-'17. In '18 the Bison finished 1-10 with their only win an upset at Holy Cross. They were outg'd by 162 ypg. In Cecchini's 1st year the Bison started 0-5 then won 3 of their L/6 and went from -116 ypg to -29 in Patriot League play. They went 2-2 in spring and were only -29 ypg. Last year they had 10 starters back which was high for the Patriot but they went 1-10, were -258 ypg and 0-8 in Patriot League play (-262 ypg). 18 starters are back and while this could be the most improved team in the Patriot, it might not show in the win column considering they were outscored by more than 4 td's per game last season.