

BUTLER BULLDOGS



POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

QUARTERBACKS - Sam Brown started 8 games in '19 and led with 1,293 (55.6%, 6-5). He returned in spring and threw for 1,155 in just 6 games and increased his completion % to 59.4 but had a 3-8 ratio. His backup was Nick Orlando who was actually their #2 rusher in both '19 & '20, putting up 606 (5.4) and 80 (2.9) respectively. Both Brown and Orlando returned last year, giving Butler a pair of experienced QB's that offer different dimensions. Unfortunately Brown suffered an injury and was lost for the season. Soph Bret Bushka won the job. He was PFL offensive POW vs Dayton when he threw for 392 but didn't top 180 against any other FCS school. Bushka led with 1,663 (60.8%, 9-11) and was their #2 rusher with 314 (4.1). Orlando started 2 games but only completed 41.2%. Brody Reder completed just 33.3% with a 0-3 ratio (125 yds). This year Orlando departs (204, 2-0, 215 rush, 4.5). If Bushka stays healthy then they have a fairly accurate dual threat QB and Reder can only get better so they are vastly improved.

RUNNING BACKS - Brad Sznajder led in '19 with 898 (4.4). He was gone in the spring though, so Kavon Samuels took over and led with 395 (3.8). No other RB topped 100 rush. Samuels returned but was injured and out for the season after the 4th game. It was AJ Deinhart who led this time, with 496 (4.9). Joey Suchy had 278 (5.0). This year they lose Samuels (238, 4.0) and Michael Benefield (229, 4.5). They return their top 2 RB's along with Jack Boyd (108, 4.7). They should see better production, provided they stay healthy this time.

RECEIVERS - Butler returned 3 of their top 5 WR's in the spring of '21 but lost their #1 guy who more than doubled #2 in '19 with 593 (14.5). Yogi Flager stepped up and led with 372 (16.2). '19's #2, Johnny O'Shea, was #2 again with 271 (12.3). RB Samuels was actually #3 with 220 (7.9). The only loss last year was Brad Huth (100, 8.3) and they had their top 3 back. Flager led with 774 (16.1). Johnny O'Shea was #2 with 513 (14.3). There was a huge dropoff to #3 with Johnny Walker only putting up 122 (15.3). This year they lose 1st Tm All PFL WR Flager (11 st), QB/WR Nick Orlando (106, 15.1), Nate Rusk (9 st, 79, 9.9) and TE Michael Schwantz (11 st). Someone will need to step up along with O'Shea.

OFFENSIVE LINE - In the spring Butler lost 4 starters on their OLine. The Bulldogs avg'd 104 rush ypg but only gave up 6 sks (2.9%). All 5 starters returned from the spring and their 3.4 ypc was their lowest since before 2010 so we said they could only get better. Butler rushed for 175 ypg and ypc improved to 4.4 (15 sk, 14.6%). This year Butler loses 4th Tm All PFL LT Gaven Johnson (11 st), 2nd Tm All PFL C Trevor Scott (11 st) and RG Grant Purlee (11 st). they get back 2nd Tm All PFL RT Skyler Spetter but this unit is down from 5 starters back to just 2.

DEFENSIVE LINE - The Bulldogs run D went from a strength in '17 (120 rush ypg, 3.7) to a weakness in both '18 (232 rush ypg, 5.7) and '19 (229, 5.6) and sacks decreased 3 years in a row from 16 to 12 to just 7! Only 1 starter returned in the spring. They allowed 58 ypg in 2 meetings vs Morehead St and 215 ypg in the other 4 games so their improvement to 163 (4.5) wasn't as impressive and they only had 4 sacks in 6 games. Their top 6 Dline all returned last year. They allowed 204 rush ypg (5.6) while sacks increased to 15. This year Butler loses DE Jordan Caselberry (11 st, #10 tkl'r, 3 sk). Only 3 of their top 6 are back but they do get 2 starters back so they are only slightly down.

LINEBACKERS - All 3 starting LB's also departed after '19. Bradley Magee was their only experienced LB. Last year the whole unit returns in tact. They had their #2, #7, #8, #12 and #13 tkl'rs back. Elói Bigirmana tied for the lead with 4.5 tfl's and their LB's made up their #2, #4, #5, #6 and #8 tkl'rs. This year they lose Bigirmana (10 st, #2 tkl'r), Magee (10 st, #4 tkl'r) and Malachi Pike (2 st, #8 tkl'r). Three of their top 5 are gone but they had excellent depth last year 4 with starting experience return and they get their #5, #6, #9 and #10 tkl'rs back. They are clearly less experienced but might not drop off much.

DEFENSIVE BACKS - The Bulldogs allowed 212 pass ypg (60.4%) in '19. Only 1 starter returned in the spring and they allowed 218 pass ypg (68%, 13-4). Last year 3 starters returned from the spring including their #1, #3, #4 and #9 tkl'rs. Their only loss was SS Mike Manning (5 st, #6 tkl'r). Butler improved by allowing just 199 pass ypg but slipped to last in the PFL in pass defense efficiency as they gave up a league high 63.1% (18-10 ratio). This year they lose CB Devin Aguilar (11 st, #7 tkl'r, 2 int, 7 pbu) but the rest of the unit returns. FS Connor Reid led with both 78 tackles and 3 int's last year. He leads an experienced secondary that goes from a weakness to their strength.

SPECIAL TEAMS - JJ Wadas made 4-5 fg's in spring (L/38). Luka Zurak avg'd 41.5 but had 2 punts blocked and bkp Ben Packer averaged 31.8 on 5 punts so their net was just 32.1. All 3 returned along with their PR (4.8) and KR (20.5) last year. Wadas only attempted 3 fg's all year but did hit all 3 (L/40). Zurak averaged 39.8 and their net improved to 36.9. This year they lose Wadas but Zurak returns. It's hard to imagine their kicker having less of an impact and they will need more from their return game in order to improve.

COACHES - Jeff Voris resigned in November, ending a 16 year run as head coach at Butler where he was 3rd in all-time wins. The new HC is Mike Uremovich. He was the OC/Asst HC at Temple from '19-'21. He was also the OC at Northern Illinois in '16 and coached the OL at NC State from '13-'15. Uremovich will serve as his own OC. 1st year DC Jeff Knowles worked as DC/LB Cch at Temple from '19-'21. He was also LB Cch at Northern Illinois in '17 then promoted to DC in '18. Knowles also spent 3 years as an asst at NC State. Joe Cheshire is the ST Coor after spending the last 4 years here as DC.

FORECAST

OFFENSE - Butler averaged 23.5 ppg and 379 ypg in '18. They were held under 30 points in all but 2 games in '19 and fell to 19.8 ppg and 309 ypg though they did finish on a positive note, putting up ssn highs of 38 points and 519 yds in their finale. Things got even worse in the spring when they put up just 15.2 ppg but ypg actually rose to 462. Last year all 11 starters gained valuable experience in the spring. They lost QB Brown before the season and RB Samuels was OFY after 4 games. They still improved to 23.8 ppg and 356 ypg but in Pioneer play only put up 16 ppg and 308 ypg and they put up 126 points in 2 games against DIII foes. This year Butler gets 5 starters back and if they have better health they should put up better numbers.

DEFENSE - In '17 Butler only allowed 25 ppg and 364 ypg but in '18 they slipped to 33.8 ppg and 449 ypg. They didn't show improvement in '19, falling to 35.7 ppg and 441 ypg. In spring Butler broke that string, improving to 29.2 and 381 ypg. 10 starters from that defense returned in fall but they couldn't replicate their success. Butler allowed 34.3 ppg and 403 ypg. This year they get 7 starters back. Their LB's & DB's have experience and 15 of their top 20 tacklers return but they are running a new system so it may take a year to see significant improvement.

2022 - Butler hasn't finished above .500 since 2017. In '18 Butler went 4-7 and were -70 ypg. They dropped to 3-9 and -132 ypg in '19 then bottomed out, going 0-6 in spring but did only finish -51 ypg. Last year Butler started 2-1 but both wins came against D III foes. In their first 3 games vs FCS foes they scored just 10 points. At 2-8 they ended on a positive note by beating Marist. Six of their 8 losses came by 14 points or more. They were -117 ypg vs PFL foes. They did finish -6 TO's and were bitten by the injury bug on offense, losing their top QB and RB. New HC Mike Uremovich has his work cut out for him. The Bulldogs open with 2 NAIA programs then travel to South Dakota State & PFL co-champs Davison. They don't get to play Stetson or Presbyterian, both who figure to be near the bottom of the PFL so it's unlikely that they top last year's 3 win total.