

CENTRAL CONNECTICUT ST BLUE DEVILS



POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

QUARTERBACKS - In 2019 they CCSU brought in Aaron Winchester from Georgia State and he had a great year as he led the team in rushing with 843 (5.3) and threw for 2,570 (64.6%) with a 20-5 ratio while taking almost every snap. Last year they have to replace their starter again and coach McCarthy felt they were deep at the QB position with tight competition from the #1 thru the #5 guy. Shon Mitchell was the Virginia HS's all time leading passer and he originally went to William & Mary. He became W&M's first true frosh to start at QB since 1975 when he started 3 games (22-58-140). In 2018 he started the first 5 throwing for 1,281 (59%, 6-6) but then was injured and did not reclaim his job. With a new Head coach in 2019 he only played in 3 games and transferred here. Romelo Williams only had 2 attempts in '19 but won the job last year. He started 9 games and threw for 1,452 (56.5%, 10-5, 159 rush, 1.9). Mitchell played in 9 games and saw most of the action in the last 2. He threw for 739 but only completed 48.4% (6-2). Both Mitchell and Williams return. Soph Alex Hawkorn also saw a little action last year so this is a more experienced group with solid depth.

RUNNING BACKS - In '18 Aaron Dawson led with 896 (7.3). In '19 Dawson was injured and played in just one game so they basically had to replace 3 of the top 4 rushers (comb 1942 yds, 5.2). Danley Exilhomme led the RB's with 635 (5.3), Keonte Lucas was #2 (529, 5.5) Enyce Walker was #3 with 355 (4.9). Last year two of their top 3 departed (comb 990 yds, 5.1). Not only did they lose less but 2018's #1 rusher Aaron Dawson was back so this unit looked to be much improved. Nasir Smith never topped 100 yards but led with 607 (4.9). Dawson was #2 with 400 (4.1). Lucas was the only other RB to top 100 yards (112, 4.5). Dawson and Lucas both depart but Smith returns and they actually lose less (comb 512, 4.2) than they did last year.

RECEIVERS - In '19 Tyshaun James emerged as one of the top playmakers in the NEC with 978 (20.4) receiving and 167 (7.0) rush. Kyren Pettaway was a distant #2 with 329 (17.3) and Giovany Peirra was #3 with 254 (14.9). Last year they returned their star and the top 3 overall. James gave them one of the top receiving corps in the NEC. James had 169 vs Duquesne but battled a shoulder injury and only led with 674 (15.0). Isiah Williams was #2 with just 243 (10.6). Eric Surratt had 177 (16.1) and Everett Wormley had a team best 24.6 ypc (172). Pettaway only contributed 159 (15.9). James signed a UFA deal with the Atlanta Falcons. Four of their top 5 return. Pierre is also back after missing 5 games last year (35, 5.8). They lose their star but 7 are back who have topped 100 rec yards in a season including TE Jadd Dolegala (10 st, 127, 14.1).

OFFENSIVE LINE - In '18 the Oline opened holes for 222 (5.9) with 6.6% sacks. In '19 they lost their best OL, J'Von Brown, after 4 games but still rushed for 214 (5.2) with 9.8% sacks and that was with the QB as the #1 rusher (QB 843 rush '19 vs 290 '18). Last year they had 3 starters back. Brown returned but was injured again in the opener. The loss of a mobile QB definitely affected them as they slipped to just 131 rush ypg (3.5) though sacks did drop to 23 (7.1%). This year they lose LT JJ Colimon (11 st) and LG Trevor Lincoln (6 st). Three starters return again. Brown would be a big help if he can stay healthy. They still lack a mobile QB so they won't return to '19's production but they are better.

DEFENSIVE LINE - In '19 this was one of the top run D's in FCS, holding foes to just 73 rush ypg (2.6) with 31 sacks. They even held Wagner to -26 yards rushing that year which was part of a dominant 6 game run where they allowed just 38 rush ypg. NEC teams ran for just 57 (2.1). Last year They were stout in their first 3 and last 4 but had a 4 game run where they allowed 224 ypg in the middle of the season. They fell to 127 (3.9) with 23 sacks. This year they lose 1st Tm NEC DE Kevin Apari (1 st, #3 tkl'r, 5.5 sk, 7 tfl), 3rd Tm All NEC NG Ifeanyi Okorji (10 st, #14 tkl'r, 1.5 sk, 3.5 tfl), DT Niam Coward (9 st, #15 tkl'r) and Michael Stuhldreer (2 st, #18 tkl'r). Four of their top 5 are gone and this goes from their strength 2 years ago to a huge concern.

LINEBACKERS - CCSU lost their #6, #8 and #9 tacklers from '19's defense that allowed just 20 ppg. Foday Jollah led in tackled in '19 but missed 6 games due to injuries. 8 different LB's saw starting action and they fell to 31 ppg allowed. This year they get their #2, #5, #9, #16 and #17 tacklers back. They do lose OLB Tyler Smith (11 st, #6 tkl'r), 3rd Tm All NEC ILB Tre Jones (8 st, #8 tkl'r, 2.5 sk, 2.5 tfl) and Jollah (1 st, 8 tkl) but they are much more experienced than last year and Chizi Ummunawake was 2nd Tm All NEC last year.

DEFENSIVE BACKS - In '19 CCSU recorded 25 int's with CB Dexter Lawson leading the way with 6 as CCSU finished 3rd in the NEC in pass defense efficiency. Last year Lawson returned but 2 starters were gone. Lawson was injured and missed the last 5 as CCSU slipped to just 9 int's and fell to 7th in pass defense efficiency (61.1%, 26-9). This year they lose FS Jahliil Brown (11 st, #1 tkl'r), Rani Abdulaziz (#7 tkl'r), CB Kaivon Gunn (6 st, #10 tkl'r) and CB Lawson (6 st, #12 tkl'r, 2 int, 10 pbu). Two starters return and injuries were a big reason they slipped so far last year.

SPECIAL TEAMS - In 2018 K Francis Cole hit 5-10 FG with a long of 50. Brandon Desautels had 46 punts with a 39.4 avg. They avg 20.4 on KR's and 11.0 on PR's so it was overall a below average unit. In 2019, Cole hit just 4-12 FG with a long of 45 and Joe Zoppi hit 3-7 with a long of 36. Cole had 39 punts (37.8) and Brandon Desautels had 15 punts (38.8). The team had just 19.7 on KR's but did avg 9.8 on PR's although they allowed foes 16.5 per PR and the unit was below average again. Both P's were gone last year. Zoppi made 10-16 fg's (L42). Aidan Clark had 55 punts (37.3). They slipped to 18.7 KR avg and 7.0 PR avg but only allowed 5.0 PR. They lose K Zoppi but the rest of the unit returns. This has been a below average unit for 3 straight years.

COACHES - Ryan McCarthy took over as HC at CCSU in October of '19 after spending 4 years as OC. In his first season as HC he led the Blue

Devils to a school record 11 wins (7-0 in NEC) and their 2nd trip to the FCS playoffs. He came to New Britain from Albany where he spent 11 years as OC and they led the NEC in total offense 4 times. Jeff Ambrosie is in his 3rd year as OC and also coaches the OLine. He was OL coach at Maine from '12-'17 and OC at University of Rochester from '07-'11. DC Ron DiGravio was DL/ILB Coach and ST Coach from '14-'18 before being promoted in '19. David Stedman is the ST Coordinator.

FORECAST

OFFENSE - CCSU's offense sputtered in '15 and '16, putting up just 17 ppg (292 ypg) and 22 ppg (359 ypg). They made a decent jump in '17, putting up 29 ppg and 362 ypg then in '18, behind a strong run game they improved to 33.8 ppg and 430 ypg. OC Ryan McCarthy was promoted to HC in '19 and they didn't skip a beat, matching their numbers (33.8 ppg, 416 ypg). After skipping out of '20 they came back last year without their star QB who also led in rushing. They looked rusty early on, getting held under 300 yards in each of their first 3 FCS games but did improve later as they put up over 310 ypg in 6 of their last 7. They only put up 21.1 ppg and 330 ypg. This year they return 8 starters. They have 2 talented QB's, their top rusher, 6 of their top 7 WR/TE's and 3 OL starters back and McCarthy has shown he knows how to get this offense rolling so expect significant improvement.

DEFENSE - CCSU improved their ypg allowed each season from '15-'19. They started with small improvements (406 ypg '15, 404 ypg '16, 402 ypg '17) then made a big jump in '18 when they allowed 25 ppg and 353 ypg. In '19 this was the NEC's top defense as they allowed just 20 ppg and 283 ypg, largely thanks to a stout run D and ball-hawking secondary. Most of their key players returned last year but they suffered 2 huge losses to injury with their top LB and CB both missing half the season. They allowed 49 ppg and 549 ypg in non-conference play but were much better vs NEC foes, allowing just 23 ppg and 319 ypg. Overall they gave up 31 ppg and 379 ypg. This year they only get 4 starters back. Only 6 of their top 15 tacklers are back. They should fare much better against non-conference foes, replacing Miami, FL with UConn and SELA lost their star QB. They only gave up 292 ypg in their last 4 and despite the losses this is still one the top D's in the NEC.

2022 - In '18 CCSU went 6-2 in the NEC with 2 close losses to Sacred Heart and Duquesne. In '19 CCSU dominated the NEC. They finished the regular season 11-0 vs FCS foes and their only loss was at Eastern Michigan by just a 34-29 final. The Blue Devils blew out their NEC rivals with a +171 ypg edge and won their conference games by avg score of 38-17. They finished +17 TO's. After taking '20 off from football they had a much tougher non-conference schedule with Miami and SELA, and traveled to both Duquesne and Sacred Heart. Not only did they have to replace their do-it-all QB but they suffered key injuries at OL, LB and CB. They lost their opener to D2 Southern Connecticut as part of a 1-6 start but bounced back to win 3 of their last 4. Their last loss was a heartbreaker where they led Duquesne 27-24 late but gave up the GW 30 yard td pass with :29 left. The Blue Devils were -64 ypg but only -6 ypg vs NEC foes. This year they get 12 starters back, replace Miami with UConn and get Sacred Heart and Duquesne at home. Sitting out '20 clearly affected them and they will go back to being a contender in the NEC.