

# DAVIDSON WILDCATS

## POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

**QUARTERBACKS** - Davidson returned a 3Y starter in Tyler Phelps last spring. He threw for 1,139 (50%, 9-5, 316 rush, 4.0) in '19 then added 676 (56%, 7-3, 307 rush, 4.1) in 7 spring games. Phelps departed in the fall, so their most experienced QB was Louis Colosimo who threw for 177 (64%, 3-0) in '19. Colosimo started all but one game and threw for 1,012 (60%) with an 11-5 ratio and was their #4 rusher with 432 (6.6). Elijah Burrell started against San Diego. He added 133 (59.1%, 1-2, 50 rush, 4.2). Colosimo was 4th Tm All-Pioneer but he departs so Burrell is the only one back with experience. Luke Durkin and LJ Phillips are also in the mix. They are inexperienced once again.

**RUNNING BACKS** - Three of Davidson's top four rushers were gone in the spring including a 2x 1st Tm All-Pioneer RB. Dylan Sparks led with 574 (4.6) and FB Coy Williams was #2 with 515 (5.0). Slot Eli Turner had 172 (5.2). Last fall they returned their top 3 and went from completely inexperienced to a strength. Sparks topped 100 in 3 of his last 4 and rushed for 903 (5.1) with 9 td's. Williams had 137 vs Morehead St, was #2 with 786 (5.6) and led the Pioneer 15 rush td's. Aris Hilliard led with an 8.5 ypc and was #3 with 605 and another 8 td's. Turner added another 304 (5.2) from the slot. Together their top 4 combined for 2,598 (5.8). Only Turner departs this year. Their top 3 return including 1st Tm All Pioneer FB Williams and 3rd Tm All Pioneer RB Sparks. This is the top RB unit in the Pioneer and Sparks could be their next 1,000 yard rusher.

**RECEIVERS** - Jalen Staples led Davidson with 489 (22.2) in '19. Three others topped 100. Two of their top 4 were gone in spring but Staples returned and led again with 222 (11.7). Last fall 3 of their top 4 returned including Staples. All 4 stayed healthy and started all 11 games. Staples led with just 269 (10.8). TE Jackson Sherrard had a 25.5 ypc and 6 td's on just 8 catches for 204. Jayden Waddell was #3 with 175 (9.7). This year they lose Staples, Sherrard and Eli Turner (11 st, 119, 14.8). Only Waddell returns so this unit needs rebuilt but like most option teams, their WR's are used more for blocking.

**OFFENSIVE LINE** - When Scott Abell was HC at Washington & Lee, his offense led D3 in rush ypg 3 of his last 6 years. Davidson led the FCS in rushing in Abell's first year, avg 428 ypg (7.2). They were #2 in rushing in '19 (322, 5.4) then led FCS with 280 (4.6) in spring. In the fall they returned just 2 starters but we said this would still be one of the top rushing schools in the FCS. Just as we predicted, Davidson led the FCS with 337 ypg (5.8) and allowed 7 sacks. In Abell's 4 years here the Wildcats Oline has given up just 15 sks. This year Davidson loses 1st Tm All Pioneer RG Khalil Miller (11 st) and 2nd Tm All-Pioneer RT Cole Foley. Three starters return plus they get back 2 starters who were injured early last season in LT Tyler Payne (2 st) and LG Chris Quiroga (7 st). Eight are back with starting experience so this is a veteran unit and should once again top the FCS in rushing.

**DEFENSIVE LINE** - The Wildcats allowed 109 rush ypg in '19 then slipped to 145 (5.2) in spring. Last year they had three starters back and 5 of their top 6 returned. Their only loss was DE James Boyle (#11 tkl'r, 2 sk). Davidson allowed 142 (4.6) and improved to 20 sacks. This year they lose DE Chibuike Odo (6 st, #9 tkl'r, 2.5 tfl) and DT Jordan Reed (11 st, #11 tkl'r, 6 tfl). Five of their top 7 return including 1st Tm All-Pioneer DE Jonathan Hammond who led the Wildcats with 64 tackles last year and had nearly half their sacks (9.5). He leads a veteran unit that will rank in the top half of the Pioneer in rush defense.

**LINEBACKERS** - Their top 4 LB's returned last year including their top 2 tacklers, Jalen Jefferson and Jake Alexander as well as their #5 tkl'r, Jaden Pask. Their only loss at LB was TJ Elliott (8 tkl). Alexander was their #2 tackler while Miles Davis (#3 tkl'r, 6 tfl) and Jefferson (#5 tkl'r) both started nearly every game. All 3 depart this year but they do get their #8, #10 and #17 tacklers back. They lack starting experience but this wasn't their strength last year so they could be better than expected.

**DEFENSIVE BACKS** - The Wildcats only allowed 169 pass ypg (61.8%, 21-9) in '19. In spring they slipped to 227 pass ypg allowed and gave up 68% (15-5). They lost 1 starter in CB Jalen Bolden (#3 tkl'r, 8 pbu, 2 int). Four of their top 5 returned including their 4, #6, #9 and #10 tkl'rs. The Wildcat improved to 194 pass ypg allowed (59.2%, 22-11) and finished #4 in the Pioneer's pass efficiency defense rankings. This year they lose SS Dreylan Hines (10 st, #4 tkl'r, 2 pd), FS Cade Vela (11 st, #7 tkl'r) and two backups (1 st, 13 tkl). Their CB's are their strength but losing both Safeties is a major concern. Their #6, #12, #13 and #20 tacklers return so depth is solid.

**SPECIAL TEAMS** - Caden Bonoffski made 6-7 fg's (L/48) in spring. Evan Pritchard avg'd 41.5 ypp (37.1 net). The Wildcats had 0 PR yards all season. Bradyn Oakley avg'd 21.3 KR and Mark McCurdy had a 23.4 avg. All four retired in the fall. Bonoffski made just 4-9 fg's (L/37). Pritchard dipped to a 40.9 average and his net fell to 36.3. Their PR combined for a whopping 7 yards and Aaron Maione averaged 21.1 KR. Only Pritchard departs this year. This was a disappointing unit last year. Pritchard was the lone bright spot but he is gone. It won't take much to improve, especially if Bonoffski finds the leg he had last spring.

**COACHES** - Scott Abell has led Davidson to back-to-back FCS playoff appearances. This is his 5th season as HC. He was the HC at DIII Washington & Lee from '12-'17 and was also their OC from '08-'11. Abell serves as his own Offensive Coordinator. Jon Berlin is the 5th year DC and also was Co-DC/LB Coach at Washington & Lee under Abell from '13-'17. Special Teams Coordinator Steven Jackson is also in his 5th year here.

## FORECAST

**OFFENSE** - Prior to Abell's hiring, Davidson averaged just 13, 17 & 20 ppg the 3 years prior. Abell, who also serves as his own OC/QB Cch immediately sparked the Wildcats offense by switching to a Triple Option. They jumped to 44.9 ppg and 547 ypg in '18. After failing to score 30 points against any FCS teams in '17, they were only held under 30 points twice all year. The Wildcats slipped to 35 ppg and 433 ypg in '19. With little time to prepare their option they fell to 26.1 ppg and 376 ypg in the spring. Last year they had 7 starters back. They improved to 36.4 ppg and 444 ypg and against Pioneer foes they averaged 41 ppg/486 ypg. They did put up a season low 21 points and 276 yards in their playoff game vs Kennesaw St. This year they have 5 starters back with veteran RB's and OL. They will likely lead the FCS in rushing again and put up close to 40 ppg.

**DEFENSE** - Davidson allowed 41 ppg and 468 ypg in Abell's first year as HC. They improved by nearly 3 td's in his 2nd year, only giving up 20.7 ppg and 278 ypg. Six of their top 10 tkl'rs were gone in spring and they didn't have the advantage of playing 2 or 3 D3 schools like they usually do. They fell to allowing 27.7 ppg and 371 ypg. In the fall actually slipped further, allowing 29.3 ppg but only 333 ypg. In their last 4 games they allowed just 286 ypg. Only 4 starters return this year and they lose 7 of their top 11 tacklers but they do return 1st Tm All NEC DE Jonathan Hammond who led with 9.5 sacks last year and they were better than their numbers indicated last year.

**2022** - When Scott Abell was hired as HC, Davidson was coming off 3 straight 2-9 seasons and had only won 7 games in 5 seasons and only 1 of those wins came against FCS competition. In '19 they started the season playing three Division 3 schools and started 3-0 including a memorable 91-61 win over Guilford where they held a 964-698 yd edge! The Wildcats won 3 league games and finished 6-5, their best finish since 2007. In 2019 Davidson started 3-0 again they lost a close game vs Campbell despite a +180 yd edge. They were 5-3 and won 3 straight before dropping their finale to Drake by a fg. Their 8-4 record was their best since 2000. In the spring they lost their opener then won 4 straight before dropping their L/2 including a playoff game at Jacksonville St 49-14. Last year they lost their opener to VMI then won 7 straight. They were upset by Dayton on the road despite a +188 yard edge then clinched the Pioneer and a spot in the FCS Playoffs for the 2nd straight season. After a 9-3 finish they are the favorites in the Pioneer. Only 9 starters return. They were +3 Net Close wins last year but finished +167 ypg in Pioneer play. They do have to travel to San Diego which could determine the Pioneer.