

DRAKE BULLDOGS

POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

QUARTERBACKS - In 2019 Ian Corwin threw for 2,101 (59%, 20-14). In spring Corwin started the opener but was 0-8 with an int and was benched for Ben Nienhuis. Nienhuis struggled vs Valpo so Hunter Wendling started the last 3 and was more effective. Wendling led with 479 (59%, 2-3). Corwin finished with 75 (39%, 3-1, 61 rush) and Nienhuis added 49 (39.1%, 0-1). Nienhuis departed in the fall but both Wendling and Corwin returned. Unfortunately injuries led to a revolving door at QB for Drake. Corwin started the first 2 but suffered an arm injury and missed the next 6. He started the last 3 and led with 756 (54.4%, 4-6). True frosh Blake Ellingson started 2 and threw for a team season high 244 vs Dayton then was out due to Covid contact tracing. He finished with 240 (53.2%, 1-1, 33 rush). Luke Bailey started 2 games but also was injured and finished with 402 and a team best 59.5% (3-3). Sean Cooney also started 1 game and threw for 101 (46.2%, 0-1). All 4 QB's return this year. All the health issues give them better depth so they've got no where to go but up.

RUNNING BACKS - In 2019 Drake returned their top rusher Drew Lauer who led with 511 (3.5) in '18. Lauer more than doubled his output, rushing for 1,127 (4.9, 233 rec). Cross Robinson was #2 with 243 (4.1) and Caden Meis added 184 (4.8). Last spring they had to replace 2nd Tm All-Pioneer RB Lauer but Robinson and Meis both returned. Robinson led with 287 (4.3) and Meis followed with 199 (5.4) in 5 games. Both Robinson and Meis are back again in the fall. Robinson led with 415 (3.7). Meis was #2 again, with 295 (4.0). Dorian Boyland was impressive in his 4 games, rushing for 145 (5.4). This year both Robinson and Meis depart along with FB Grant Gossling (6 st) but Boyland had the best ypc among the RB's last year. They are less experienced but more explosive.

RECEIVERS - In '19 Drake lost their 1st Tm All-Pioneer WR who nearly hit 1,000 yds in '18. They did get back their #2 and #3 receivers including Devin Cates (570, 12.7 '18). Cates led with 627 (12.3). Last spring they lost their top 5. Colin Howard led with 256 (17.1) but no one else topped 90 yards. Last fall Drake gets 5 of their top 7 back including their top 2 so they were in much better shape. Howard led with 549 (21.1). Brandon Langdok was #2 with 265 (8.8). Matt Hartleib added 210 (9.6) and Ryan Hayes was #4 with 208 (12.3). No other WR topped 100 yards. This year they return their top 3, only losing TE Hayes (10 st, 208, 12.3). They are much more experienced and Howard was 2nd Tm All-PFL last year so this goes from a weakness to a strength.

OFFENSIVE LINE - Last spring Drake had to replace all 5 starters on the Oline. Their new starting lineup gained valuable experience in the spring when they averaged 119 (3.5) rush ypg with 10 sks allowed but 6 came in the opener. In the fall they fell to 104 rush ypg (3.1) and allowed 17 sacks. That number was propped up by 304 rush (5.6) vs D2 WV Wesleyan and they only averaged 82 rush ypg (2.7) vs FCS competition. This year Drake loses RT Tyler Barrett (10 st), C Mark Bach (5 st), C Jonathan Engle (4 st) and Colin Mott (1 st). Three starters return and they've got 5 with starting experience. They struggled mightily last year and are actually more experienced having played a full season.

DEFENSIVE LINE - Drake only allowed 97 rush ypg (2.7) in '18 with 29 sacks. They took a nose dive in '19, allowing 185 rush ypg (4.6) and sacks were cut in half to 14. Last spring the Bulldogs lost all 4 starters yet they held 4 of their 5 foes to 81 rush yds or less and only allowed 77 (2.2). They finished with 12 sacks but 8 of those came in their finale vs Presbyterian. Last year they had all 4 starters back from the spring including DT Jake Hoper who led with 3.5 sks. They fell back to 180 rush ypg (4.7) and just 9 sacks but only actually allowed 140 in their first 8 before getting gashed for 213 vs St Thomas and 470 vs Davidson's option. This year they lose DT Hoper (11 st, #6 tkl'r, 2.5 sk, 4.5 tfl), DT Max Johnson (11 st, #8 tkl'r, 2.5 sk, 2 tfl), DE Ben Gerdes (11 st, #10 tkl'r, 2 tfl) and Johnny Hill (1 st, 3 tkl). Five of their top 7 return. This was a better unit than their numbers indicated last year so they could be better than expected this year.

LINEBACKERS - Only 1 starting LB returned last spring so this was another position that needed rebuilt. Declan Carr led the spring with 34 tkls and Ryan Kricer stepped in with 30 tkls and was #2 with 5.5 tfl's. The Bulldogs returned all 3 starters in the fall including their #1, #2 and #4 tkl'r's along with their #12 tkl'r. Carr was #2 with 55 tackles. This year Carr (11 st) and Kulick (11 st, #4 tkl'r), Noah Larson (#12 tkl'r) and Tanner Pollock (#13 tkl'r) and departed. Only 2 of their top 6 and this goes from a strength to weakness.

DEFENSIVE BACKS - In '19 Drake allowed 174 pass ypg (60%, 10-8). In conference play they held foes to just 51% completions but allowed 73% against non-conference foes. Last spring they got 2 starters back including their #2 and #3 tkl'r's. The Bulldogs allowed allowed 197 ypg (55%, 2-4). Last fall they had their top 5 DB's return including 4 starters and their #3, #5, #6, #10 and #15 tkl'r's. They allowed just 181 pass ypg and 59.9% (10-8) and finished #2 in the Pioneer's Pass Defense Efficiency ranking. This year they lose 2nd Tm All PFL SS Alex Rogers (10 st, #1 tkl'r, 2 int, 6 pbu), CB Jeran Proctor (10 st, #7 tkl'r, 2 int) and 2 backups (17 comb'd tackles). They get their #3, #9, #15, #16 and #20 tacklers back and should be near the top of the PFL pass D rankings again.

SPECIAL TEAMS - In '19 Nathan De Bruin made 3-5 fg's (L/41). He returned in spring and made 2-3 fg's (L/43). Shane Dunning avg'd 38.9 ypp (tm net 36.7). Andrew Kasten avg'd 8.3 PR and Danny Morales avg'd 19.0 KR. Drake allowed just 11 PR yds in the spring. Their ST unit remained in tact last fall. De Bruin and Dunning combined to make just 3-10 fg's (L/38). Dunning also averaged 39.1 ypp but his net dropped to 35.3. Danny Morales averaged 24.1 KR. They allowed just 9 PR yards. This year the whole unit returns in tact again and their kicking can only get better after a massively disappointing season.

COACHES - Todd Stepsis returns for his 4th season as head coach after spending 5 years as DC here. He was also spent 6 years as the DC at D2 Saginaw Valley St. No OC is listed on the staff as of July. Al Smith joined the staff here in '19 and took over as DC after Stepsis was promoted. ST Coordinator Willie Cashmore is a former Drake football standout. His first year coaching here was in '13 and he was promoted to DL/ST Coor in '19.

FORECAST

OFFENSE - Drake saw their ppg and ypg drop each season since from '16 until last fall. They averaged 25 ppg and 343 ypg in '19 but was much better vs Pioneer foes, putting up 31 ppg/389 ypg. In spring of '21 they dipped to 18 ppg and 243 ypg. Last fall they put up 45 points and 529 yards vs D2 WV Wesleyan in the opener then were held to 14 points or fewer in 8 of their last 9 games and were shutout twice. Against FCS foes they averaged just 9 ppg and 251 ypg. A big reason for their struggles was injuries at QB. Now they have 4 QB's with starting experience. Six starters are back on offense and they've only got one way to go this year so with better health they are much improved.

DEFENSE - In 2018 Drake allowed just 19 ppg and 296 ypg. In '19 they allowed 32 ppg in non-conference games but only 23 ppg in Pioneer play. Overall they allowed 25 ppg and 359 ypg. Only 5 of their top 15 tkl'r's were back last spring. They only allowed 274 ypg but gave up 443 in their only non-conference game. In the fall they were hung out to drive by a struggling offense. They allowed 23 ppg and 361 ypg and just 20 ppg/352 ypg vs PFL foes. This year they only return 4 starters. Only 2 of their top 10 tacklers are back so they may see their numbers dip in '22.

2022 - Drake had a streak of 4 straight winning seasons broken in the spring. They were unlucky with all 3 losses coming by 4 points or less, but were also severely outgained in 2 of those, including a 3 point loss to San Diego where they were outgained 267-25! All 22 starters were back in the fall but the experience didn't give them an advantage considering everyone was experienced. Injuries at QB made things worse and they lost their first 3 vs FCS foes before pulling out a 6-3 win over Butler. They lost their last 5 games, with 3 losses coming by 7 points or less including a 3 point loss at San Diego but were blownout by Davidson 45-14 in their finale. Drake finished 2-8 and were -86 ypg in PFL play. 10 starters return this year. The non-conference schedule doesn't lighten up as they open at North Dakota State and travel to Idaho 2 weeks later. They miss Presbyterian and face and their first 5 PFL games come against teams who finished with winning conference records last year then their schedule lightens up but 2 of those games come on the road so this could be another season finishing towards the bottom of the PFL.