

DELEWARE BLUE HENS

POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

QUARTERBACKS - The Blue Hens returned starting QB Pat Kehoe (2075, 49%, 17-9) and backup QB Nolan Henderson (152, 60%, 1-0) in 2019. They were also bringing in a new fast past offense. Kehoe was 2-9-11-0-1 vs NDSt and Henderson took over that game and started the next 2. Kehoe returned to start 3 then missed 2 more game which Henderson started before returning to start the last 2. Kehoe led with 1,335 (59.8%) 11-8 while Henderson threw for 933 (56.3%, 9-1!) and rushed for 189. In the spring of '21 season they had to replace Kehoe. Henderson threw for 1,482 (71%, 10-4) and rushed for 101 (1.4). He was injured early and played banged up the rest of the season. Zach Gwynn, who originally signed with East Carolina, played here as a frosh backup (6-10-59-0-0) and Anthony Paoletti has hit 2-3 passes in 2 years. All 3 returned last year. Henderson started the first 4 throwing for 646 (58.8%, 4-0, -57 rush) but was injured his hip vs Albany and this time missed the rest of the season Gwynn took over starting the final 7 and throwing for 1,328 (55.6%, 8-9, -58 rush). Paoletti saw time as a their Wildcat QB (#2 rusher, 227, 3.8) but threw for just 2-5-7-0-1. This year all 3 again return again and hopefully Henderson can stay healthy as he was the only QB with a positive ratio last season.

RUNNING BACKS - In '19 Delaware lost 2 of their top 3 rushers in RB Kani Kane (8 st, 595, 4.0, 10 td) and WR Joe Walker (120, 5.7, 1 td). They returned their #1 RB DeJoun Lee (originally at Army), who led with 606 (4.9 2 td) despite starting just 4. Will Knight emerged and took the top spot with 919 (7.4) almost double the yards of Lee despite just 125 carries to Lee's 107. Lee was #2 with 463 (4.3). Andre Robinson was #2 with 211 (3.6). In the spring of '21 season Knight Lee led again with 564 (4.7) earning the CAA OPOY (90 rec, 219 KR) while Khoury Spruill emerged as #2 (350, 4.1). QB's were #3 & #4 rushers. Last year the unit returned intact. Lee led again with 814 (4.6, 5 td, 80 yd rec) with QB Paoletti #2. This year they lose 2nd Tm CAA RB Lee who started all 11. They return their next 3 RB's in #3 rusher Quincy Watson (159, 4.1, 1 td), #4 Sprull (130, 3.9, 1 td) & #5 Marcus Yarns (80, 3.5). While they have some experience with the loss of their top rusher from the past two seasons this unit may take a step back.

RECEIVERS - In 2019 the receiving corps needed to be rebuilt as they lost their top 6 in receptions, who combined for 2,147 yds (17 td) including 3rd Tm CAA WR Joe Walker (670, 4 td) & AA TE Charles Scarff (498, 11.6, 7 td). Their top returning receivers were Gene Coleman (8-135) FB Owen Tyler (56, 6.2), who in the new offense moved to TE. Their top returning WR was Thyrick Pitts (31, 15.5). Pitts led with 647 (15.8) while Coleman finished #2 with 325 (10.2). Will Knight was #3 (275, 13.8) and Chichi Amachi was #4 (251, 19.3). TE Bryce De Maille was #5 (243, 15.2). In the spring of '21 season, they had to replace Knight and Amachi. In their 8 game season Pitts led again with 451 (15.6). Coleman was #2 (433, 9.6) and TE De Maille finished #3 (169, 10.6). All 3 returned last year. Pitts (11 st) missed 1 game but still led with 669 yds (15.6) and had 7 of the team's 12 receiving td's and earned 2nd Tm CAA honors. Coleman (9 st) finished #2 with 426 (13.8, 2 td), while Brett Buckman (9 st) was #3 (219, 13.7). De Maille (3 st) was #4 (161, 11.5) & James Collins (1 st) was #5 (138, 11.5). This year 4 of those 5 return along with TE Brandon Brose (8 st, 80, 16.0) but lose #2 Coleman. They also add Presbyterian transfer WR Jalyn Witcher, who as a true frosh last year started all 11 game. He finished the season with 80 receptions for 1,120 yds (7.3, 12 td) and was a Jerry Rice Award Finalist (FCS Frosh of Year).

OFFENSIVE LINE - In 2018 the OLine paved the way for just 105 ypg rush (3.0) with 8.4% sacks. In 2019 the unit lost former Penn St transfer, 3rd Tm CAA RT Noah Beh (12 st), their C (5 st) & a bkp (1 st). They returned 4 OL who combined for 42 sts led by AARG/C Mario Farinella (12 st). The more veteran unit opened holes for 156 ypg rush (4.2) but did allow 11.5% sacks in the new offense. In the spring of '21 season, they had to replace C Farinella, Brandon Nixon, Connor Lutz, MJ Kehoe, and Chuka Ezeuzoh. They returned Carter Lynch but he along with the rest of the unit OLine was banged up all season. After a solid start with 224 rush vs Maine and 361 vs Rhode Island, the banged up unit paved the way for just 84.5 ypg rush and 2.0 ypc over the last 4 games with 15 sacks after just 7 sacks the first 4. Last year the unit returned mostly intact led by 1st Tm CAA OL David Kroll and paved the way for 120 ypg (3.3) while allowing 23 sacks (7.9%). This year they lose two 11 game starters in 2nd Tm AALT David Kroll & RT Ben Trent along with two backups who combined for 3 starts last year. They return 5 OL who earned starts last year in RG Patrick Shupp (11 st), LG Stevon Brown (9 st, C James Prince (5 st), C Brock Ginfrich (L/4 st) & LG Brenden Clark (1). That gives them a solid core but the loss of both tackles & their leading rusher for the past 2 season could make it hard for them to improve on last years production.

DEFENSIVE LINE - In 2018 Delaware had the CAA's #6 rush defense allowing 135 ypg rush (3.6 ypc) despite being #11 in sacks with 16. In '19 the DLine only lost a DE (6 st, 15 tkl, 2 tfl). They returned 8 of their top 9 including former Cincy transfer DE Caleb Ashworth (12 st, 56 tkl, 3.5 tfl), 3rd Tm CAA DT Cam Kitchen (11 st, 47 tkl, 3.5 tfl), former Ball St transfer DE Frank Burton (3 st, 27 tkl, 3 sk, 2 tfl) & DE Branden Hall (6 st, 22 tkl, 4 tfl). Ashworth played in just 5 games (10 tkl). Still it was surprisingly they fell to #11 CAA allowing 181 ypg rush & 4.8 ypc as they were last in the CAA with just 6 sacks. In the spring of '21 season they lost 5 of their top 6 in DT Kitchen (64 tkl, 3 sk, 3.5 tfl), DE Sal Mauro (42 tkl, 4.5 tfl, 3 pbu), DE Hall (32 tkl, 2 sk, 1 tfl), DT Ashworth & DT Dominik Covatto (11 tkl). Their top returnee was DE Frank Burton (24 tkl, 1 tfl, 1 pbu). They brought in new DC Manny Rojas and improved to #4 CAA allowing just 121 ypg rush (3.5 ypc) and increased their sacks to 17 (#2 CAA) despite playing just 8 games. Last year the unit returned their top 6 DL in DT Artis Hemmingway (8 st, 24 tkl, 2.5 sk, 2.5 tfl), DE Tommy Walsh (20 tkl, 4.5 tfl), DE Nick Coomer (19 tkl, 2 sk, 2 tfl), 2nd Tm CAA DE Chase McGowan (12 tkl, 2.5 tfl), who led with 5 sacks & DE Burton (12 tkl) & DT Jordan Morris (7 tkl). Coomer was injured and played in just 3 games (9 tkl). Against a schedule with Rutgers & 4 ranked teams they slipped to #6 CAA allowing 134 ypg (3.7 ypc) as they again 17 sacks despite playing 3 more games. This year the unit turns their top 5 DL in DE Walsh (11 st, 30 tkl, 2 sk, 3 tfl), 3rd Tm CAA DT Hemmingway (22 tkl, 2.5 sk, 1 tfl), 3rd Tm CAA DE McGowan (1 st, 20 tkl, 4 sk, 2 tfl), DT Morris (2 st, 18 tkl, 1 sk) & DE Coomer. In the third year of the defense we look for some solid improvement.

LINEBACKERS - In '19 the LB unit lost 4 who combined for 36 sts, 278 tkl & 24 tfl including former Penn St transfer, AA MLB Troy Reeder (131 tkl, 13.5 tfl). They returned OLB Colby Reeder (11 st, 51 tkl, 4 tfl) but the next most experienced returning LB was Drew Nickles (11 tkl, 1 sk) but did add Penn St transfer Dae'lun Darien. They went from allowing 21.5 ppg (#3 CAA) & 352 ypg (#7) in '18 to allowing 28.7 ppg (#10) & 424 ypg (#11). For the spring of '21 season they brought in a new DC. They also returned their top 5 LB in #4 tkl'r Nickles (61 tkl, 1 int, 2 pbu), #7 Matt Palmer (46 tkl, 1.5 tfl, 1 int), #8 Johnny Buchanan (34 tkl), #8 Anthony Toro (44 tkl, 1 tfl) & #14 Liam Trainer (19 tkl). In their 8 games season that included 3 playoff games they allowed just 14.4 ppg (#1 CAA) & 239 ypg (#2). Last year they again returned their top 8 LB including 1st Tm CAA LB Buchanan (#2 tkl'r, 42 tkl, 2 tfl), #5 tkl'r Liam Trainer (28 tkl, 3.5 tkl), #10 BAN Colby Reeder (17 tkl, 2 sk), #11 BAN Toro (16 tkl, 1.5 tfl) & #12 BAN Darien. They slipped to allowing 23.4 ppg (#6 CAA) & 339 ypg (#5). This year they lose 2 of their top 4 LB's in 3rd Tm CAA MLB Reeder (7 st, 56 tkl, 3.5 sk, 3.5 tfl), who was the #5 tkl'r despite missing 3 with injury, along with BAN Darien (5 st, #8, 34 tkl, 3.5 tfl). They return 3 of their top 5 in #1 tkl'r 2nd Tm CAA WLB Buchanan (8 st, 80 tkl, 5.5 tfl), #3 MLB Liam Trainer (5 st, 61 tkl, 6.5 tfl) & #11 BAN Toro (26 tkl, 3.5 tfl). With a solid core back they should have a good shot at improving off last year's numbers.

DEFENSIVE BACKS - In '19 the secondary lost 4 who combined 41 sts, 227 tkl, 26 pd including AA Tenny Adewusi (12 st, 87 tkl, 4 int, 7 pbu), who became the Blue Hens highest draft choice (#2 LAC) since Joe Flacco. They went from #6 CAA in pass efficiency defense (217 ypg, 58.7%), allowing a great 12-15 ratio, to #12 (243 ypg, 64.2%) allowing a poor 23-8 ratio. In the spring of '21 season they lost #9 tkl'r Tim Poindexter (34 tkl, 1 int). They returned 5 of their top 6 DB's led by 1 tkl'r 3rd Tm CAA SS Kendrick Whitehead (102 tkl, 1 int, 3 pbu), #2 FS Noah Plack (73 tkl, 3.5 tfl), #10 CB Nijuel Hill, #11 CB Justis Henley (36 tkl, 1 tfl) & #15 DB Riah Burton (14 tkl, 1 pbu). The experienced unit did very well in the new defense as they jumped up to #1 CAA in pass efficiency defense (118 ypg, 50.6%) allowing a good 7-11 ratio. Last year they returned their top 6 DB's in #4 tkl'r AA SS Whitehead (31 tkl, 2 tfl, 1 int, 2 pbu), #1 2nd Tm CAA FS Plack (45 tkl, 2 int, 2 pbu), #6 1st Tm CAA CB Hill (25 tkl, 3 int, 3 pbu), #15 CB Henley (13 tkl) & #16 FS Joe Zubillaga (13 tkl, 2 int). They surprisingly slipped to #7 in pass efficiency defense (205 ypg, 57.5%, 11-9). This year they lose two 11 game starters in 2nd Tm CAA CB Hill (30 tkl, 4 tfl, 1 int, 6 pbu) & KAT Andrew Pawlowski (50 tkl, 2 tfl, 1 int). They return 6 of their top 8 DB's led by 2nd Tm CAA AA SS Whitehead (11 st, 75 tkl, 1.5 tfl, 8 pbu), #4 2nd Tm CAA FS Plack (8 st, 57 tkl, 3 pbu), #7 S Zubillaga (3 st, 38 tkl, 2 pbu) & #12 CB Henley (21 tkl, 1 int, 7 pbu). Especially with their top 2 back this unit should move closer to their spring of '21 season performance.

SPECIAL TEAMS - In the spring of '21 season Delaware had to replace K Jake Roth (12-20 FG, L/42) & P Nick Pritchard (42.7 avg, 37.0 tm net). They returned K Ryan Coe who had 13 TB/36 KO. Coe hit 12-17 FG with an outstanding L/53 & had 18 TB/44 KO. P Tyler Pastula had a 39.6 avg (32.8 net). Both returned last year. Coe hit 14-17 FG (L/53) with 31 TB/ 48 KO earning 3rd Tm CAA. Pastula improved to avg 42.5 ypp (35.5 net) earning 1st Tm CAA. This year both depart and they have a new STC. They return 2nd Tm CAA PR Jourdan Townsend (9.0) and bring in several transfers at P but have no experience returning in the kicking game and will likely take a big step back this season.

COACHES - At the end of Last season HC Danny Rocco was let go after going 31-23 in his 5 seasons including winning the CAA Title in the spring of '21 season. They bring in Ryan Carly, who was a member of Delaware's 2003 National Championship team. He was the OC at Sam Houston St the last 4 years including their National Championship season in the Spring of 2021. He spent the previous 11 years at New Hampshire including 6 as the OC He brings in new Pass Game Coor Terence Archer, who spent the last 8 seasons as the WR cch at Sam Houston and was Pass game Coor there last year. New Run Game Coor Chris Rogers spent the last 5 years at Sam Houston including the last 2 as OLine cch. They return 3rd year DC Manny Rojas, who was the DC at Lafayette College in 2019 after 2 years at Delaware as the STC/LB cch. Their new STC is Art Link, spent the past 5 years as HC at Christopher Newport University leading them to a 19-22 overall record. He spent the previous 2 years coaching with HC Carly at UNH as the LB cch.

FORECAST

OFFENSE - In 2019 under a new HC they brought in a new fast past offense. While they returned 6 starters on offense including their starting QB they went from putting up 24.4 ppg (#7 CAA) & 300 ypg (#10) in '18 to just 23.2 ppg (#10) despite improving to 346 ypg (#8). In the spring of '21 season they returned just 4 starters & lost their starting QB. Still in the second year of the new offense they made it deep into the playoffs. In an 8 game season that included 3 playoff games they scored 25.8 ppg (#4 CAA) while their 342 ypg was #3 in CAA. Last year most of their top offensive players returned and much was expected. The offense however proved a disappointment as they only produced 19.7 ppg (#9 CAA) & just 300 ypg (#11), which helped bring about the change at HC. This year they return 7 starters but they are learning a new system under HC Ryan Carly. He was the OC at Sam Houston the last 4 years & his Pass & Run Game Coordinators both worked under him there. Last year the Bearcats put up 41.0 ppg & 491 ypg (228 rush, 263 pass), but the offense will need to learn the system & bring in some players to fit the new system before they can equal those numbers.

DEFENSE - In 2019 the Blue Hens allowed 28.7 ppg (#10 CAA) & 424 ypg (#11), which led to the hiring of DC Manny Rojas after the season. In the Spring of '21 season they took a huge step up despite playing 3 playoff teams as they allowed just 14.4 ppg (#1 CAA) & 239 ypg (#2). Last year they returned their top 21 tacklers but in some part do the offense struggling they slipped to allowing 23.4 ppg (#6 CAA) & 339 ypg (#5). This year while they lose 4 of their top 9 tkl'r's they return 7 starters and 15 of their top 19 tkl'r's giving them some experienced depth & with the retention of DC Rojas, they are in the 3rd year of the defense and should improve on last year's numbers.

2022 - After finally getting back to the playoffs in '18, expectations are high for Delaware in '19 but they had just 10 returning starters overall, the change in offense & the loss of 7 of their top 10 tkl'r's, all from the back 8 including a #2 DC. While they had the advantage of avoiding both James Madison & Maine in 2019 the Blue Hens went just 5-7. In the spring of '2021 season, the much more veteran defense led the way allowing a paltry 239 ypg as they went 5-0 in CAA play (+163 ypg) as the won the CAA Title and then won a pair of playoff games before losing to #1 seed South Dakota St. Last year with most of their top players back much was expected from the Blue Hens as they were picked by the media to finish #2 in the CAA behind JMU & came into the season ranked #5. They opened with wins on the road at Maine & at home vs St Francis before an expected loss at Rutgers. They were still ranked #9 after the loss but then only got by Albany 20-15 as they lost starting QB Henderson for the season vs the Great Danes. Still at #9 they blew a 4Q lead at #20 Rhode Island, losing 22-15. The wheels continued to come off as the #15 Blue Hens blew another 4Q lead and were then upset at unranked Stony Brook 27-20 in OT. They were still ranked #23 when they hosted #6 JMU. They led 10-9 at HT but despite holding JMU to just one TD, they lost 22-10. They held on for 7 pt win over FCS newcomer Dixie St & then upset #24 W&M to get to 5-4 but then lost their last 2 at Richmond & vs #9 Villanova. They missed the playoffs and brought in a new HC. They have 14 starters back but lose both their K & P & will be learning a new offense. On a positive note they will be in their 3rd season under DC Rojas' system which should help the changeover. This year JMU moves to the FBS and off the Blue Hens schedule, which makes it a little easier and they host CAA newcomers Hampton & Monmouth, and with their defense they have a solid shot at a winning season, but would need the offense to learn the new system & excel in it to make the playoffs a possibility.