

EASTERN WASHINGTON

POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

QUARTERBACKS - Eric Barriere threw for 3,712 yards (59%, 31-4) in 2019 and was 3rd Tm Big Sky. Barriere was 1st Tm AA and was the runner-up for the Walter Payton Award in the spring of '21. In just 7 games he threw for 2,435 yds (62%, 19-7) & was the #3 rusher with 144 (2.8, 1 td). Barriere returned last fall along with backup QB Gunner Talkington (132 yds, 2-0) & they added Arizona St transfer Ryan Kelley (PS#12)! Barriere had a phenomenal season as he topped 500 pass yards in a game 4 times including throwing for 600 yards (74%, 6-0) vs Idaho and 530 yards (59%, 5-1) in their playoff loss to Montana. Overall Barriere finished last fall #2 in the FCS with 5,070 pass yards (65.4%, 46-8) and was 2nd Tm AA and was also named the Walter Payton Award Winner! Barriere departs this season, leaving a big hole at the QB position. The battle this season will likely be between Talkington and Kelley. Whoever wins the job will have big shoes to fill, but both QB's have been in the system & this position may not take a big a step back as some might expect.

RUNNING BACKS - Going into the spring '21 season EWU lost their top rusher (1228, 6.3, 16 td). Tamarick Pierce would lead the Eagles last spring with 462 yards (5.4) while Dennis Merritt was #2 with 302 (4.3). Last fall EWU got back their top 6 RB's and Merritt would take over as the leading rusher with 933 (12 st, 4.6, 15 td) and was 2nd Tm Big Sky. Justice Jackson was the #2 rusher (317, 5.9) while Pierce only played in 5 games & finished last fall with 172 yards (4.5). This fall the Eagles lose Merritt along with Pierce. Returning at RB is Jackson along with Isaiah Lewis (186, 6.6) and Micah Smith (139, 3.9). Losing their leading rusher is a key loss, but their are a trio of RB's set to return & all are talented so their shouldn't be much off a dropoff in production.

RECEIVERS - Talolo Limu-Jones led EWU in the spring of '21 with 759 yards (15.8) while Freddie Roberson was #2 (470, 14.2). The Eagles returned everyone who caught a pass in the spring and this unit was in excellent shape entering the fall of '21. Limu-Jones once again led EWU in receiving with 1,122 yards (10 st, 15.8) and was 1st Tm Big Sky. Andrew Boston was #2 (969, 14.0, 7 td) while Roberson was #3 (779 (15.9, 6 td) and Efton Chism finished #4 (735, 13.9, 9 td). This season Roberson (3rd Tm Big Sky) and Chism (3rd Tm Big Sky) both are back, but EWU loses their top two in Limu-Jones and Boston (2nd Tm Big Sky). Also returning for EWU at receiver is Jakobie James (246, 14.5), Robert Mason (232, 11.6) and TE's Blake Gobel (2 st, 208, 16.0) and Dylan Ingram (8 st, 146, 11.2). Losing the top two is tough, but this unit still has plenty of talent back for 2022.

OFFENSIVE LINE - The OLine paved the way for 208 ypg rush & 5.3 ypc in 2019 while allowing 30 sacks (6.4%). In the spring of 2021 they slipped to just 158 ypg (4.3) but allowed just 11 sacks (3.6%)! Last fall EWU returned 6 OL who combined for all 35 starts in the spring. The rushing numbers stayed consistent as the Eagles ran for 155 ypg (4.2) and they gave up just 24 sacks on 573 pass att (4.2%). This season EWU loses a trio of starters in 1st Tm Big Sky LT Tristen Taylor, 4th Tm Big Sky C Conner Crist, and RT Matt Shook. Five players are back that had starts LY including 3rd Tm Big Sky RG Wyatt Musser and LG Wyatt Hansen. Despite the loss of three starters, talent remains on the OLine, they shouldn't see much of a dropoff as several players return with start experience.

DEFENSIVE LINE - The Eagles DLine allowed 179 ypg rush (4.3) in '19 with just 18 sacks (3.9%). In the spring of 2021 they slipped to allowing 196 ypg (4.5) but had 13 sacks in 7 games (7.0%). The returned their top 7 DL last fall led by DT Joshua Jerome (#3 tkl'r), who led the team with 3 sks in the spring. The run defense did show some improvement as they gave up 162 rush ypg (4.3) and they collected 31 sacks (7.1%). DT Jerome led the DLine last fall with 61 tackles (13 st, 7 sk, 6.5 tfl) and was 4th Tm Big Sky. DE Mitchell Johnson (13 st, 50 tkl, 5.5 sk, 4 tfl) and was also 4th Tm Big Sky. Both Jerome and Johnson return this season along with DE Deborae'ae McClain (13 st, 38 tkl, 4 sk) and DT Matthew Brown (12 st, 16 tkl, 2.5 tfl). With the top 9 tacklers on the DLine all set to return this season, this unit is in excellent shape entering 2022.

LINEBACKERS - The LB unit suffered the most loss as 3 LB's that combined for 5 starts in the spring were gone. This unit did return 5 LB's who combined for 16 starts so the cupboard wasn't bare by any means. Ty Graham was the top LB tackler in the spring & he was top #1 tackler again last fall (13 st, 120 tkl, 11 tfl) and 4th Tm Big Sky. Jack Sendelbach also had a stellar season (11 st, 95 tkl, 10.5 tfl) and was 4th Tm Big Sky as well. The bad news for this unit is that both Graham and Sendelbach depart in 2022 along with LB's Cale Lindsay (6 st, 45 tkl, 6.5 tfl) and Jusstis Warren (2 st, 21 tkl). The top 4 LB's are gone this fall & the top returnees are Ahmani Williams (10 tkl) and Conner O'Farrell (9 tkl). EWU does get back NB Marlon Jones (5 st, 47 tkl, 5 pbu, 3 int) but this unit likely will take a step back this season.

DEFENSIVE BACKS - In the spring of '21 the Eagles allowed 186 ypg pass (54%, 10-7). The unit returned their top six tacklers last fall, but the #1 tackler from the spring, S Anthony Smith, only played the L/6 games (5 starts) due to injury. S Calin Criner led the secondary with 83 tackles (13 st, 9 pbu, 2 int) and was 3rd Tm Big Sky. S Ely Doyle started the F/8 games & had 40 tackles (3 pbu). This season Doyle and A. Smith (38 tkl) return at safety, while Tre Weed (F/11 st, 37 tkl, 4 pbu) and Darrien Sampson (13 st, 29 tkl, 3 pbu) return at CB. The lone loss is Criner, but the EWU secondary looks to be in good shape still with 6 of the top 8 DB's back including a trio of starters back this fall.

SPECIAL TEAMS - Seth Harrison was 12-12 on fg's in 2019 (L/40) and went 6-9 fg's in the spring of 2021. Last fall Harrison went just 6-12 on fg's (L/41) and two other kickers combined to go 5-7 fg's. Overall last fall EWU went just 11-19 on fg's. P Nick Kolich was the main guy in 2019 & averaged 39.0 yards per punt (34.6 team net). Last spring Kolich averaged 39.2 yards per punt (34.9 net). Kolich was back last fall and averaged 40.2 yards per punt (35.4 net). In the spring of '21 EWU had 2 players top 100 KR yards and only collected 42 PR yards all season. Last fall WR Chisom led with 203 KR yards and 104 PR yards. This season EWU returns all three of their fg kickers, their punter, and their top return man. If the Eagles are able to have one fg kicker emerge and convert more fg's this unit should be in for a solid season.

COACHES - Aaron Best has been involved with Eastern Washington since he was a player there from 1996-99. He began coaching as a SA in 2000 and was a GA in 2001. Best went to the CFL for 1 season (2007) but returned in 2008 as the OC and held that role until 2017 when he was promoted to HC. Entering his 6th season Best is 41-17 at EWU (30-8 in Big Sky) and has led the Eagles to three trips to the FCS Playoffs including going to the title game in 2018! Jim Chapin enters his first season as the OC here. Prior to EWU Chapin spent the previous four seasons as the OC at Sioux Falls. Jeff Copp was elevated to the role of DC entering the 2022

season. Copp had been the DT coach here since the spring season in 2021. Prior to here Copp spent four seasons at FIU as the co-DC there.

FORECAST

OFFENSE - In 2018 EWU led the Big Sky in scoring (43.1 ppg) & total offense (528 ypg). With a new OC in 2019 they were again #1 in scoring (40.6 ppg) & led the FCS in total offense (525 ypg). In the spring of 2021 among teams that played a full Big Sky schedule they were #2 in scoring (37.7 ppg) & led again in total offense (525 ypg). Last fall they returned all 11 starters on offense and the Eagles were again #1 in scoring in the Big Sky (44.0 ppg) and also total offense (556 ypg!). The Eagles were also #1 in the FCS as their offense put up 196 ypg above what their foes allowed on average! This season EWU loses Walter Payton Award Winner QB Eric Barriere, their top RB, top two WR's and three starters on the OLine. With just 4 starters back & a new OC coming in, we don't see the offense this season matching what the Eagles put up last fall.

DEFENSE - In 2018 the Eagles were #2 in the Big Sky in scoring defense (23 ppg) & #3 in total defense (392 ypg). In 2019 they plummeted to #9 in both scoring (34.6 ppg) & total defense (445 ypg). In the spring last year they improved to #5 in scoring (27 ppg) & #4 in total defense (382 ypg). The defense returned 11 starters & 16 of their top 19 tkl'rs last fall. EWU finished last fall as #6 in total defense (383 ypg) and scoring defense (27.8 ppg). This fall the defense gets back 8 starters and they should likely have another solid unit this season.

2022 - EWU enters the 2022 season with 12 returning starters but just 4 on the offensive side of the ball. They open the season at home vs Tenn St before playing at Oregon. After an early bye week they open Big Sky play vs Montana St before traveling to Florida. The next week they are at Weber St and then face Sac St at home. Three of their next four games are on the road as they face Cal Poly, Idaho and Montana. EWU closes at home against Northern Colorado. EWU lost two home games last fall to Weber St and Montana St, which snapped their 20-game home win streak & will out for revenge in both of those games. The two games vs top-level FBS programs are tough, but EWU has a manageable Big Sky schedule. Five teams including EWU made the playoffs LY from the Big Sky and the Eagles avoid UC Davis and get Montana St and Sac St at home with their toughest conference road game being at Montana. A new QB, RB, and WR's will have to emerge on offense, but the defense overall has a good amount of talent back. If the offense can find some new playmakers the Eagles will likely be in the hunt for the Big Sky crown and another trip to the FCS playoffs.