

MAINE BLACK BEARS



POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

QUARTERBACKS - In 2018, QB Chris Ferguson (12 st) threw for 2,372 (56.3%, 22-11) in 14 games leading the Black Bears to the FCS playoffs semi-finals. He started the first 6 games in 2019 throwing for 1,655 (58%, 8-8) but was OFY. Joe Fagnano threw for 1,835 (65.8%, 17-3) over the last 7 games. He helped Maine rattled off 4 straight wins at one point. He also rushed for 192 (2.2). In the spring of 2021 Fagnano started all 4 and threw for 795 (57.8%, 8-1). His backup is Derek Robertson hit 4-4-28. Last year both returned but Fagnano in his second start vs JMU injured his leg and sat out the next 7 games. He returned to start the final 2 games leading the Bears to just their 4th ever win over an FBS team (UMass) & then a 13 pt win over New Hampshire. For the season Fagnano threw for 794 (60.2%, 6-2, -12 rush). Robertson filled in starting the 7 middle games throwing for 1,505 (50.8%, 12-4, 4 rush). Both return again this year and if they stay healthy should put up improved numbers.

RUNNING BACKS - In 2019, Ramon Jefferson, who was the first Maine Frosh RB to rush for over 1,000 yds (1037, 5.7, 8 td) being named CAA ROY in 2018, was suspended in the spring & then transferred. The only experienced returning RB was #2 rusher Joe Fitzpatrick (476, 4.0, 4 td). They added Buffalo transfer Emmanuel Reed, who rushed for a combined 1,211 yds (4.3, 12 st) over the previous 2 seasons. Fitzpatrick led with 531 rush yds (4.5, 7 td). Reed was #2 with 467 (4.2, 5.2). He was followed by QB Fagnano & two WR's who all had 146+ rush yds. The next RB was Elijah Brooks with just 58 (4.8). In the spring of 2021 the Bears had to replace all three RB's. They added Rutgers transfer Elijah Barnwell who finished #2 with 112 (3.0). Frosh Freddie Brock led with 178 (5.9). Last season they added Lafayette transfer John Gay, who rushed for 216 yds as a frosh in '18 & was a 2nd Tm all-PL KR in the spring season. Brock led again with 720 (5.5, 7 td) and was 4th Tm CAA. Barnwell was again #2 with 514 (4.4, 4 td). With two WR's in the top 5 rushers, RB Tavion Banks was #4 (47, 2.8), while Gay was #6 (9, 1.8). All four RB's return this year giving them an experienced unit.

RECEIVERS - In 2019, the Black Bears lost 2 of their top 4 receivers in 3rd Tm CAA WR Micah Wright (11 st, 539, 11.5, 6 td) & 2nd Tm TE Drew Bletcher (14 st, 357, 7.8). They returned 4 of their top 6 including their top 2 in 2nd Tm CAA WR Earnest Edwards (14 st, 839, 15.8, 10 td) & WR Jaquan Blair (6 st, 572, 13.3, 5 td). Those two were dominant in 2019 with Edwards leading with 1,097 (22.4) and Blair #2 with 839 (12.9). Devin Young was #3 with 593 (14.5) and Andre Miller was #4 with 529 (18.9). In the spring they had to replace their top 2 and then Young opted out due to injury. Miller led with a super 348 (16.6) in just 4 games and UConn transfer Zaiver Scott was #2 (101, 14.4). Last year all the top guys returned & they got back Young making this a very deep unit. Miller led with 684 (9 st, 17.5, 3 td) earning 1st Tm CAA & Young was #2 with 585 (10 st, 10.8, 3 td) earning 3rd Tm CAA. This year they both depart but they return their next 6 receivers led by 3rd Tm CAA TE Shawn Bowman (11 st, 282, 11.6, 4 td), WR Jacob Hennie (3 st, 145, 11.2, 1 td) & WR Xavier Scott (6 st, 114, 10.3, 1 td). With the loss of their top 2 starts this unit may take a step down but with the overall experience that step may not be a big one.

OFFENSIVE LINE - In 2019 the OLine lost just 1 starter in 3rd Tm CAART Cody Levy (14 st). They returned 5 OL who started 8+ in '18 led by 2nd Tm CAA G Liam Dobson. The OLine paved the way for 134 (3.8) in 2018 with 5.8% sacks but only had similar numbers in 2019 with 129 (3.9) and 7.7% sacks. 3rd Tm AA OL Liam Dobson transferred to Texas St after the 2020 season was postponed. In the

spring of 2021 they lost LT Tyler Royal to injury and had just 127 ypg rush (3.6) but did only allow 5 sacks in 4 games (4.1%). Last year they got back Royal and added some solid transfers like PJ Barr from Bucknell, Michael Gerace from John Carroll and Jack Webb from Sacred Heart. While Webb did not play both Barr (RT) & Gerace (C) started all 11. Maine again put up very similar rush numbers (128 ypg) but allowed just 6 sacks (1.7%) in 11 games. This year they lose 3rd Tm CAA RT Barr & utility OL Gunner Docos, who had a total of 6 starts at three different positions last year. They return four OL who each had 8+ starts last year led by 1st Tm CAA C Gerace. Since they have done it for 3 straight years we will call for similar rush numbers & could come close to last year's pass protection numbers as well.

DEFENSIVE LINE - In 2018 Maine had the CAA's #1 rush defense allowing just 79 ypg (2.4 ypc) with 47 sacks. In 2019 the DLine returned all 4 starters led by 1st Tm CAA DE Kayon Whitaker (13 st, 50 tkl, 9.5 sk, 2 tfl) & 2nd Tm DT Charles Mitchell (11 st, 23 tkl, 3.5 sk, 3.5 tfl). Surprisingly they almost exactly double what they did in '18 (157, 4.3) as their sack total dropped to 26. In the spring of 2021, the DLine had to replace 2 starters in #3 tkl'r DE Whitaker (65 tkl, 9 sk, 11 tfl, 2 pbu) 7 DT Mitchell (47 tkl, 1 sk, 5 tfl) along with two experienced backups (42 tkl, 2 sk, 3.5 tfl). They returned DE Jamehl Wiley (12 st, 23 tkl, 4 sk), & Maine's '19 ROY, NT Josh Lezin (17 tkl, 1.5 tfl) & added BYU transfer DT Austin Chambers. Playing just 4 games they had a very un-Maine like performance allowing 212 ypg rush (#9 CAA) & 5.3 ypc. Last year they returned both DE Wiley (#2 tkl'r, 1.5 tfl) & NT Lezin (#7, 0.5 tfl) along with DE Khairi Manns (#5, 1.5 sk, 1.5 tfl) & DT Chambers (#10). Wiley started the first 3 before missing the next 6 game & finished with just 16 tkl. While they improved allowing 161 ypg (4.6) they slipped to #10 CAA with just 12 sacks. This year they only lose DT Chambers (L/8 st, #10 tkl'r, 31 tkl, 1 pbu). Wiley returns along with DE Manns (#6 tkl'r, 3 sk, 3 tfl), DE Xavier Mitchell (#8, 1 sk, 1.5 tfl), NT Lezin (11 st, #11, 3 tfl) & DT/DE Justin Sambu (8 st, #13, 3 tfl). With 5 back with starting experience Maine, we look for the unit to have improved numbers this season especially in sacks.

LINEBACKERS - In 2019 the LB corps lost AA ROV Sterling Sheffield (14 st, 84 tkl, 9.5 sk, 8.5 tfl) but returned the other 2 starters in MLB Deshawn Stevens (13 st, 120 tkl, 9 sk, 8 tfl) and WLB Tajji Lowe (13 st, 85 tkl, 3 sk, 12 tfl) but Stevens played in just 1 game (5 tkl). After allowing 23.4 ppg (#5 CAA) & 313 ypg (#4 CAA) in '18 they slipped to allowing 29.4 ppg (#11) & 367 ypg (#5). In the spring of 2021 they had to replace LB Lowe (13 st, #1 tkl'r, 9.5 tfl) but returned Stevens. Shockingly they plummeted to last in the CAA in scoring defense allowing 33.5 ppg & 367 ypg (#5 CAA). Last year they lost #1 LB Stevens (#1 tkl'r, 1 pbu) & LB Myles Taylor (#6, 2 tfl). They returned WLB Adrian Otero (#2 tkl'r, 27 tkl, 1.5 tfl) and added Campbell transfer Ray Miller, who had 179 tkl & 14.5 tfl in 32 games for the Camels. The Black Bears improved to allowing 27.0 ppg (#10 CAA) but slipped to allowing 387 ypg (#11). This year they lose 2nd Tm CAA MLB Miller, who led with 103 tkl (3 sk, 7 tfl, 1 int). They return two 11 game starters in ROV Xavier Nurse (#4 tkl'r, 2 sk, 2 tfl) & WLB Otero (#3, 2.5 tfl). They lose their top tkl'r for a fourth straight season but should still be able to improve their overall numbers.

DEFENSIVE BACKS - In 2018 Maine allowed a CAA worst 234 ypg passing (49.7%, 28-18) but led the CAA with 18 int's. The secondary lost two 14 game starters in 2019 in SS Jeffery DeVaughn (74 tkl, 3 int, 8 pbu) & FS Darrius Hart (72 tkl, 2 int, 4 pbu). They returned AA CB Manny Patterson (14 st, 47 tkl, 3 int, 22 pbu), CB Katley Joseph (8 st, 34 tkl, 1 int, 12 pbu) & CB Shaquille St-Lot (5 st, 14 tkl). While they improved to #4 CAA allowing just 210 ypg pass (52.4%, 17-3) but was last in CAA with just 3 int. In the spring of 2021 they had to replace CB Patterson and then all-CAA CB Joseph opted out. Surprisingly in their 4 games, they allowed just 149 ypg passing (#3 CAA, 49.2%, 5-1) but only had 1 int. Last year the secondary added Maryland transfer Fofie Bazzie. CB Joseph was expected to return but was injured (MCL) & missed the season. They finished #10 CAA in pass efficiency D allowing 226 ypg passing (59.1%, 22-10). This year they lose FS Bassie (9 st, #2 tkl'r, 4 pbu), CB Richard Carr (11 st, #7, 2 int, 6 pbu) & CB Kolubah Pewee (16 tkl, 3 pbu), who started the first 5 but transferred. The unit returns 4 that combined for 19 starts last year led by SS Shakur Smalls (#5 tkl'r, 2 int, 6 pbu), CB Kahzit Brown (6 st, #12, 3 int, 1 pbu) & SS Austin Ambush (17 tkl, 2 pbu). This unit looks to be the biggest concern on the defense.

SPECIAL TEAMS - The Special Teams returned P Derek Deoul (37.1 avg), K/KO Kenny Doak (11-18 FG, 8 TB/71 KO) & 1st Tm CAA KR Earnest Edwards (25.7 ypr, 2 td) in 2019. Deoul had a 41.9 avg, Doak hit 14-21 FG (L/45), Jaquan Blair avg 14.0 on PR's & Edwards a super 28.5 on KR's. In spring of '21 they had to replace all 4. New P David Gelb avg'd just 36.1 ypp, Stetson transfer K Johnny Messina hit 2-3 FG/L/33). Jordan Swann avg 16.0 on just 3 PR and Freddie Brock just 11.6 on 11 KR. Last year they only lost Swann. Gelb avg'd 40.1 ypp, Messina hit 13-17 FG (L/42) & FAU transfer K Vladimir Rivas had 16 TB/56 KO. KR Devin Young had 26.6 ypr but the team avg'd 5.3 ypr on punts. This year they must replace all 4 & their STC moved to DC and the unit could take a step back.

COACHES - In 2019 Maine lost the CAA COY, who left for a pay raise as a DB cch at Minnesota. Nick Charlton, '18's OC took over as HC, but after going 14-13 in 3 yrs, he left for a pay increase to be UConn's OC. Former Maine DL cch Jordan Stevens returns after spending the last 7 yrs at Yale, incl the L/4 as Co-DC/Asst HC. New DC Jared Keyte enters his 7th year here including the last 4 as STC. They return 4th year OC Andrew Dersner, who started here as the WR cch in '18. The new STC has not been determined.

FORECAST

OFFENSE - The Black Bear's returned 7 starters on offense in 2019 from the CAA's #5 scoring (26.5 ppg) and #8 total offense (349 ypg). Their 1,000 yd rusher transferred & then QB Chris Ferguson, who started 12 (2372, 56.3%, 22-11) in '18 was OFY after starting the first 6. Despite leading the CAA in pass offense (297 ypg) they were just #5 in scoring offense (29.3 ppg) & #3 in total offense (425 ypg). In the spring of '21 the offense again lost their top rusher, top 3 receivers, AA OL & then their LT (injured). They slipped to 332 ypg (#5 CAA) & 22.5 ppg (#6). Last year their top players all returned & they added some solid transfers but their starting QB missed the middle 7 games with injury. They put up just 25.0 ppg (#4 CAA) but improved to 338 ypg (#7 CAA). This year they lose 3 all-CAA players including their top 2 WR's. They return 8 starters with their top 2 QB's, top 4 rushers, 6 of their top 8 receivers & 4 staring OL & should rank toward the top of the CAA.

DEFENSE - In 2019 the defense returned 8 starters to the CAA's #5 scoring (23.4 ppg) & #4 total defense (313 ypg) from 2018. Surprisingly they plummeted to #11 in scoring (29.4 ppg) & slipped to #5 in total defense (367 ypg). In the spring of '21 they returned 7 starters but in their 4 games allowed 33.5 ppg (last in CAA) & 362 ypg (#7 CAA). Last year they lost 4 of their top 2 tkl'rs including 2 starters at LB (#1 & #6 tkl'r). They improved to allowing 27.0 ppg (#10 CAA) but slipped to allowing 387 ypg (#11). This year they return 8 starters but lose 4 of their top 10 tkl'rs including their top 2 and have a new DC, but he has been here the past 6 years. This unit has not lived up to it's "Black Hole defense" roots for several years now, but this unit has the potential to get a little closer to their vaunted roots this season.

2022 - In 2018, Maine won the CAA Title & made it to the FCS semifinals finishing 10-4. In 2019 they had to replace the '18 CAA COY, who had been the lowest paid HC in the CAA as he left for a pay raise as a FBS position coach. Maine opened just 2-5 but won their next 4 before losing their finale to finish 6-6. In the spring of '21 Maine was 2-2 before their final 2 games were cancelled. Last year the Black Bears opened just 1-4 including losses to #5 Delaware, #3 JMU & eventual MAC champion NIU. They won 5 of their last 6 to finish 6-5. One of those wins was over UMass just Maine's fourth victory over a Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) program in school-history as after trailing 10-0, they scored 35 unanswered points to win 35-10. This year they again lose their HC to the higher paying FBS (UConn OC). While they again face 2 FBS foes (New Mexico & BC), and switch Delaware for Villanova, JMU is replaced by Hampton. With 15 starters back they have the potential to move up but how well the team buys into the new HC will be a big factor as to how far up they can climb. While we expect them to have a good shot at a second straight winning season they may be a year or two away from returning to the playoffs.