

MERRIMACK WARRIORS

POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

QUARTERBACKS-Christian Carter was a returning starter in '19 and led with 2,095 (56%, 15-10, 304 rush) but he departed in their spring season. Malakai Anthony started the opener and threw for just 91 (63%, 1-0). He was replaced by Jack Esquivel who had just 2 attempts the prior year. Esquivel started the last 2 and threw for 293 but only hit 49.3% (3-5 ratio). Last year they made a significant upgrade with the addition of Louisiana Tech transfer Westin Elliott (6'5" 235) who saw action in 12 games over 4 years for the Bulldogs. Elliott was the only QB to take a snap all season as he nearly hit 3,000 yards (2929), completed 67.9% with a 30-16 ratio. He was named 2nd Tm All-NEC and returns this year after leading the conference in passing yards and td's. Anthony and Esquivel add experienced depth. Elliott should be Merrimack's first 3,000 yard passer during their FCS era.

RUNNING BACKS - Matt Brehon returned in spring after leading Merrimack with 666 (6.4) rush in '19. Brehon struggled to get going, and finished with just 61 (3.1). Both Brehon and Jamari Venter (599 '19) averaged over 6.0 ypc in '19. This was a very experienced unit until Brehon was lost for the season in the 2nd game (104, 3.9) and Victor Dawson missed the last 7 games (230, 5.2). True frosh Tyvon Edmonds played in 8 games and led with just 240 (3.9). The only loss this year is Jamari Venter (3 st, 202, 3.8). They get 3 of their top 4 back and after last year's injury issues this should be their most improved group if they stay healthy.

RECEIVERS- In '19 Merrimack had 2 WR's top 600 yards in Johnny Rosario (637, 16.8) and Marquis Spence (760, 10.4). Spence was gone in spring and Rosario only played in 1 game. Anthony Norcia led with 111 (10.1). TE Tyler Roberts was #2 with 73 (12.2). Jelani Mason added 72 (7.2). Last year they had their top 5 back including Rosario. Jacari Carter had 241 yards in a 2 game stretch vs Holy Cross & Maine. He led with 713 (8.0). TE Roberts was #2 with 535 (10.3). H-Back Pat Conroy led with an outstanding 24.4 ypc and Johnny Rosario added 285 (15.8). This year they only lose Rosario and Norcia (189, 11.1). 4 of their top 5 are back including both 1st Tm All NEC WR Carter & TE Roberts. This has the makings of the top WR unit in the conference.

OFFENSIVE LINE - In '19 Merrimack ran for 164 ypg (4.8). They lost 3 starters in the spring and fell to just 88 ypg (3.0) and their sack % rose from 6.4 (24) to 9.7 (9). Last year they were led by RT Clay Legault but the other 4 starters from '19 were gone and only 3 returned with starting experience. With more emphasis put on the pass game they dropped to just 72 rush ypg (2.7) with 23 sacks (8.1%). This year they lose 1st Tm NEC RT Legault (10 st), C Ralph Paige (10 st) and OG Shawn Page (9 st). Only 2 starters return, making their least experienced group on offense.

DEFENSIVE LINE -The Warriors only allowed 121 (3.4) rush ypg in '19. They also had 35 sacks including 10 in their finale vs Rhode Island! Last spring they brought back 2 starters. Gone were their #9 and #12 tkl'rs and they allowed at least 173 rush yds in all 3 contests (192, 4.0, 7 sk). All 4 starters from the spring returned in the fall including DE's Cory Hagerman who led with 9.5 sks in '19 (#2 tkl'r last year) and Nicholas Lenon (7 sk 2Y). Merrimack held their first 5 foes to 116 (3.7) ypg then was gashed for 215+ in 4 of their last 6. They improved from the spring, allowing 177 (4.5) but weren't close to matching '19's production. 8 saw starting action last year and all 8 return this year. DT Nick Martino was their #3 tkl'r and led with 4.5 sacks. Hagerman missed 6 games last year. With excellent depth they could approach the level they played at in '19.

LINEBACKERS - All 3 starting LB's left after the spring, along with their top backup. They had to replace their #1, #4, #5 and #6 tkl'rs at LB. Last year they get their #1, #4, #5 and #15 tkl'rs back from spring but this was a young unit after only seeing significant action in 3 games. This year they return their #1, #4, #5, #8 and #19 tacklers. The only loss is Keegan Woods (6 st, #15 tkl'r). Rodney Samson was 1st Tm All NEC last year (#1 tkl'r, 8 tfl) and all 3 starters are Seniors so this is their most experienced unit on defense.

DEFENSIVE BACKS - Merrimack only lost 1 starter in their secondary from '19 when they allowed just 191 pass ypg and 49.7% (16-16). They returned their #6, #7, #9, #10, #11 and #14 tkl'rs in the fall. Three were multi-year starters and this was the strength of the defense. They allowed just 144 pass ypg and 50% completions (18-9), which put them #3 in the conference in pass efficiency defense. This year they lose CB Caleb Holden (11 st, #13 tkl'r, 8 pbu, 1 int). 1st Tm All NEC CB Darion McKenzie led with 9 pbu's last year. They return their #2, #6, #7, #10, #12 and #18 tacklers. This is once again their strength and is in the running for the top secondary in the conference.

SPECIAL TEAMS- Matt Sokol took over fg duties in spring and missed both of his chances to cement the job. Cole Peterson avg'd 34.7 ypg (31.7 net). Jacari Carter avg'd 14.0 PR and Shaka Males avg'd 32.8 KR. All 4 ST's members were back but only had a few games of experience. Liam Davis attempted just 2 fg's (1-2, L/39). Peterson averaged 33.3 and their net was just 26.9. Jacari Carter was their lone highlight with 15.1 PR avg (1 td) and Darion McKenzie and Rodney Samson combined for 671 KR yards. They can't possibly get less from their kicking game so they only have one way to go and their return men all are back.

COACHES - Former NFL Fullback Dan Curran is in his 10th season as HC. He jumped right into being the OC here for 3 years from '10-'12 after ending a his professional career the prior season. He has a career record of 40-49. Curran serves as his own OC. Mike Gennetti is in his 10th year as DC and 19th overall with the program. Bryan Robbat is the ST's Coordinator and has coached here for 7 seasons.

FORECAST

OFFENSE - In '19 Merrimack put up 29 ppg and 376 ypg but that number dropped to 20.4 ppg when you remove 3 games vs lower division schools. In spring of '21 they only put up 12 ppg and 220 ypg in 3 contests. Last year they averaged 41 ppg and 455 ypg in their first 4. After suffering significant attrition at RB they dipped to 20.4 ppg and 284 ypg in their last 7. In conference play they only put up 20 ppg and 284 ypg while scoring 36 ppg and 415 ypg vs non-conference foes. This year they get 8 starters back including QB Elliott and they should stay healthier at RB. They had some impressive performances early in the season last year and this could be a breakout year for Merrimack with excellent depth at QB, RB and WR.

DEFENSE - Merrimack only allowed 21 ppg overall and 26 ppg against FCS foes in '19. Last spring they returned 9 of their top 15 tkl'rs after allowing 24 ppg and 331 ypg in 3 contests. The Warriors held 5 of their first 7 opponents to 266 yds or less then gave up over 402 ypg in their last 4. 10 starters are back this year and 18 of their top 20 tacklers return, only losing #13 and #15. Five are back that were 1st Tm All NEC including 2 that were 1st Team. They showed what they were capable of in '19 and they could surpass that defense as the best in their short FCS history.

2022 - The Warriors made a successful transition in their jump from Division 2, going 6-5 in their first season in FCS but that was derailed in the spring when they went 0-3 and were -111 ypg. They only had 1 game against a lower division team, traveled in 3 other non-conference games and only had 5 home games. We said they won't match '19's 6 wins but would at least win a few games and be competitive. They pulled a shocking upset over eventual playoff team Holy Cross on the road in their 2nd game, winning 35-21 with a +104 yard edge. They were one play away from a 4-0 start then things fell apart as they lost 5 of their last 7 with each loss coming by double digits including an embarrassing loss to CCSU where they trailed 42-0 2Q. They finished 5-6 and were +28 ypg but 2-4 vs NEC and -69 ypg. This year they have an older roster with 15 Seniors and 18 starters are back. They trade out Bryant in NEC play for new FCS member Stonehill and get St. Francis, Wagner, LIU and Sacred Heart all at home. With more experience and a more favorable schedule they could match '19's 6 win mark.