

NORTH CAROLINA CENTRAL EAGLES



POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

QUARTERBACKS - True freshman Davius Richard started the final 10 for NC Central in '19. Richard was just the sixth QB in school history to pass for over 2,000 yards (2,020) and completed 51.8% of his passes with a 12-9 ratio and added 245 rush (3.2). NC Central didn't play football in '20. Richard returned last year and improved to 58% completions and a 15-6 ratio while throwing for 2,133. He was also their #2 rusher with 363 (4.1) and led with 8 rush td's. He was just the 2nd QB in NCCU history to top 2,000 pass yards in consecutive seasons. HC Oliver calls Richard a field general that does a really good job of reading defenses and has developed his body and overall strength. He is backed up by Walker Harris who threw for 152 (56.3%, 0-0, 24 rush) who Oliver calls really smart with a strong arm. Also in the mix is rFr Quest Powell.

RUNNING BACKS - NC Central returned two-year starting RB Isaiah Totten in '19 but lost the next four leading rushers behind him. Totten had a very productive campaign in '18, rushing for 768 yards (5.5). He made every start at RB for NC Central in '19, but as the do-everything-back, Totten was able to gain just 619 yards (3.9). Totten returned last year along with Jordan Freeman (365, 5.1) and Latrell Collier (245, 3.2). Collier had 115 vs Howard and led with just 399 but also had a 5.0 ypc. Totten only had 296 but his ypc increased to 4.0. Freeman added 208 (4.2). This year they lose both Totten and Freeman along with Jamal Currie-Elliott (125, 4.0). Collier is a swiss army-knife that has good hands and can run between the tackles. He has led the team in td's each of the last 2 seasons. J'Mari Taylor is elusive with good quickness and vision. Josh Pullen and Arthur Rodgers (Marshall transfer) are both big physical RB's and JUCO transfer Christian Mosley is a home run hitter. They get their top guy back but their depth is less experienced.

RECEIVERS - NC Central returned it's top five WRs and seven of their top nine. Tulsa transfer Ryan McDaniel led the team with 368 receiving yards (9.4) as a Jr. in '19 while fellow Jr. E.J. Hicks, who was second in receiving in '18, led the team with 14.6 ypc (351) during '19. McDaniel had 178 vs NC A&T and led with 678 (13.0). Andrew Smith finished #2 with 362 (16.5). Devin Smith had 302 (13.1). This year NCCU loses 2nd Tm All-MEAC WR McDaniel, Isiah Macklin (201, 12.6) and Daeshawn Stephens (164, 10.9). Treveon Platt (302, 12.1 2Y) had the best spring of the WR's. He has very good speed. HC Oliver said Devin Smith has unbelievable hands, great route runner and a knack for making big plays. Andrew Smith is physical with good top end speed. Also look for Tyler Barnes (6'4" 220, 103, 7.9) to play a bigger role. They have 2 of their top 4 back and Oliver likes their length on their edge but they are less experienced this year.

OFFENSIVE LINE - Last year NCCU brought back 2 starters from '19. The Eagles rushed for 113 (3.3) in '19 but really struggled in their last 3, rushing for 37 ypg. NCCU rushed for 207 in their opener against Alcorn St last year but lost OG Robert Mitchell for the season and they didn't top 200 again until the road finale vs Howard. They finished with 133 (4.2, 22 sk). This year NCCU brought in 22 OL to camp. They have 4 starters back, plus they get Mitchell back from injury. HC Oliver thinks Corey Bullock is the best OL in the MEAC and he was named 1st Team Preseason All Conf. They do lose OG Bruce Trigg (2nd Team All MEAC). Torricelli Simpkins (3rd Tm All MEAC LY) is the heartbeat of the Oline. They also added DII transfer Xi Simpson from Wingate U. This is the most improved group on the offense and they've developed nice depth.

DEFENSIVE LINE - In '19 NC Central allowed 160 (4.1) but they ended on a sour note, giving up a season high 343 rush (7.0) vs NC A&T. Only one starter returned last year in DE Jesse Malit (orig NCSt). The Eagles allowed 196 rush ypg (5.3) and sacks were cut in half, from 29 (9.6%) to 15 (4.2%). This year NCCU loses Chuck Manning (#13 tkl'r, 2 sk, 3 tfl) and Chidi Okonya (#19 tkl'r, 1.5 tfl). Their top 3 return including Malit (#11 tkl'r, 3.5 sk, 2 tfl) who was named 2nd Team Preseason All-MEAC. They also get back Tre Turner who had tied Malit for the lead with 3.5 sacks. Six of their top 8 are back. HC Oliver says Jaden Taylor (#4 tkl'r, 6 tfl) has exceptional strength and Colby Warrior (#15 tkl'r, 2 tfl) is an excellent edge rusher. This unit goes from a weakness to a strength. They should be better against the run and sacks will increase.

LINEBACKERS - NCCU lost their top 3 LB's heading into last season. Noah Rainbow-Douglas led in tackles (87) and tfl's (8). Cole Williams was close behind with 83 tackles. Matt Stevens had 34 tackles. This year they once again lose their top 3 LB's with Rainbow-Douglas, Williams and Stevens all gone. Jaki Brevard had 5 tackles and HC Oliver says he is very smart and can play in the box or in space. Solomon Sutton is a physical downhill LB. This is the youngest group on the team but they are in the same shape entering the season as they were last year.

DEFENSIVE BACKS - NC Central only allowed 169 pass ypg (56.8%, 22-14) in '19 and was 5th in the MEAC in pass D efficiency. They returned 3 of their top 5 DB's from '19. The Eagles allowed 210 pass ypg but that number was inflated by allowing 463 at Marshall in their 2nd game. They were 2nd in the MEAC in pass D efficiency despite giving up 63% and a 17-5 ratio. This year the Aggies lose Travon Wallace (#6 tkl'r, 6 pbu) and Stephen Stokes (#8 tkl'r). They return 8 of their top 10 DB's. Their CB's are the most experienced unit on the team including Brandon Codrington (#7 tkl'r, 4 pbu). HC Oliver says he has quickness, instincts and top end speed. JaJuan Hudson (#5 tkl'r, 3 pbu) has a high FB IQ. S Manny Smith (#3 tkl'r) is a good open field tackler and physical in the run game. Oliver says Khalil Baker has shown the most growth since last year. This unit is clearly a strength.

SPECIAL TEAMS - In '19 Kicker Adrian Olivo was a 4th Team Frosh AA after making 10 of 13 fgs. Last year Olivo was 1st Team All-MEAC, hitting 10 of 11 fg's (L/43). Juan Velarde averaged 37.9 (34.3 net). Brandon Codrington was an All-MEAC PR and KR, avg 15.7 PR and 22.5 KR. This year they get all 3 back and this is the MEAC's top ST's unit.

COACHES - Trei Oliver was named HC in December of '18. He has coached for 5 conference champions and 3 black college football national titles. Oliver was DC at Southern from '16-'18, OLB Coach at NC A&T from '11-'15, OLB Cch/ST Coor at Grambling from '07-'10 and also coached here as DB/WR Coach and ST Coor from '03-'06. Matt Leone is the 2nd year OC/QB Coach. He spent 4 years at Southern as QB Coach. Courtney Coard is the DC is the new DC/DL Coach. He returns to his alma mater after spending 6 years as Co-DC at NC A&T. The Eagles do not have a designated ST Coor.

FORECAST

OFFENSE - NC Central averaged between 28 and 30 ppg each year from '14-'16 but fell to just 21 ppg (321 ypg) in '17. They improved in '18, putting up 26 ppg and 348 ypg but they only averaged 21 ppg/326 ypg vs MEAC foes. In '19 they made a change and brought in HC Oliver. NCCU dropped to just 18 ppg and 298 ypg. After taking '20 off from football, NCCU came back last year with just 5 starters back on offense. They only put up 18.9 ppg in their first 8 but hit their stride in their last 3 with 38, 45 and 34 points. Overall they improved to 24 ppg/342 ypg and against MEAC foes averaged 34 ppg/394 ypg! This year 8 starters return including QB Richard and 4 starters on the Oline. They were #2 in the MEAC in scoring and total offense in conference play and should be even better this year.

DEFENSE - In '18 NCCU allowed 30 ppg and 415 ypg. They allowed over 600 yards twice and 500 or more 3 more times. In '19 they made a change to defensive minded HC Oliver. The impact was felt immediately as they allowed 27 ppg and 330 ypg but also held 5 foes under 300 yards. Last year 4 starters were back. They improved by allowing 26 ppg but ypg rose to 401. This year they lose 5 of their top 10 tacklers including their top 2 but are in better shape after sitting out a whole year in '20. Their DB's are the strength of the D and they could be improved with 6 starters back.

2022 - In '17 NCCU went 6-4 and was +3 ypg. They dropped to 5-5 and were -68 ypg with only 1 loss by single digits in '18 and they made a change, hiring HC Trei Oliver. The Eagles lost their first 3 in '19 before beating a lower division school then Oliver got his first MEAC win beating Morgan St on the road. At 2-5 NCCU won B2B games over Delaware St and Howard. After losing to Norfolk St they were shutout in their last 2 (comb'd 78-0) and finished 4-8 but improved to -32 ypg (-25 ypg vs MEAC). Last year they opened with a win over Alcorn St in the MEAC/SWAC Challenge. They scored to take a 16-10 lead with :25 left against MVSU but allowed a td on the games final play and lost by 1. At 2-5 they beat Morgan St then lost to SC State 27-24. The Eagles won their last 3 games including a win over Norfolk St despite getting outgained 483-334 and they beat Delaware St despite getting outgained 341-254. NCCU finished 6-5 but was -59 ypg and while they were 4-1 in MEAC play, they were -9 ypg. This year they have 14 starters back and the best ST's unit in the conference. They open with rival NC A&T and play 2 lower division schools in their first 4. The Eagles only get 2 home games in MEAC play but they were picked to finish 2nd in the conference by the Media and Oliver has done a good job here. Their game at South Carolina State on 10/22 could decide the MEAC Title.