

NORTH CAROLINA A&T AGGIES

POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

QUARTERBACKS - In '19 Kyll Carter nearly ran the offense to perfection. He threw for 2,220 (54.6%) with an 18-3 ratio and was their #2 rusher with 579 (4.9). Carter departed last year and Jalen Fowler was their most experienced QB after the Aggies sat out the Covid year. Fowler threw for 262 (58.1%) and did have 3 td passes in '19. He threw for 262 and 2 td's vs Furman in the opener, missed the game vs Duke then started the last 10. He finished with 1,774 (55.7%, 10-8) and added 106 rush (1.8). Kingsley Ifedi started vs Duke and threw 2 td passes vs South Carolina St after Fowler was benched following a 1 of 6 start. Ifedi threw for 236 (50%, 2-1). Fowler returns but their depth is inexperienced with Ifedi departing. As long as Fowler stays healthy they are improved.

RUNNING BACKS - In '18 Jah-Maine Martin was NC A&T's #2 rusher with 656. They lost a 1,000 yard rusher heading into '19 but Martin was clearly capable of reaching that mark considering his 6.7 ypc in '18. Martin not only rushed for well over 1,000 (1446, 7.7) but had 23 td's. He topped 100 on 7 occasions, was an AP 2nd Team AA and a finalist for the Deacon Jones Award. He had 299 vs Charleston Southern. Martin returned last year but wasn't nearly the same back. He started all but 1 game and only topped 100 once, finishing with 522 (3.9). This year Martin departs along with their #2 rusher Kashon Baker (396, 5.3). Their top returning rusher is Bhayshul Tuten who had more receiving yards (230, 23.0) than rush yards (215, 5.8). They only have 5 RB's on the roster and 4 are Frosh or Redshirt Frosh so they have very little experience.

RECEIVERS - NC A&T returned 3 of their top 4 WR's from '19 but their biggest loss was Elijah Bell who was #2 in '18 with 541 (11.3) and led in '19 with 855 (15.5). Zachary Leslie was their top returner (652, 15.5) but he only played in 5 games and had just 4 catches for 80 yards. Ron Hunt had 5 for 146 in the opener vs Furman but never topped 3 catches again. He led with just 362 (17.3). Korey Banks was #2 with 291 (11.6) but did miss the last 3. Jamison Warren had 280 (11.7) and Taymon Cooke had 200 (11.8). This year the Aggies lose Hunt (11 st) and Banks (7 st) as well as Elijah Bowick (153, 19.1) and Kayshon Baker (115, 10.5). They add Ger-Cari Caldwell (PS#210) who had 1 catch for South Carolina last year. They go from 3 of their top 4 back to 2 but the 4 WR's that departed only add up to 921 yards last year so they should be replaceable.

OFFENSIVE LINE - NC A&T rushed for at least 160 ypg each year from '11-'19 when the Aggies had their best season of the decade with 239 (6.0). After sitting out the year NC A&T rushed for 200+ in 4 straight including 208 vs Duke and after 6 games they had allowed just 3 sacks. They absolutely fell apart in their last 6 games, averaging just 79 rush ypg (2.6) and they gave up 17 sacks in their last 5 games! This year they get three starters back including 1st Tm All Big South C Dequari Wilson. They have 72 career starts returning and RT Tariq Stewart (orig WVU) should slide right in at RT after starting 4 games last year. They should be much better in their 2nd season back after sitting out '20.

DEFENSIVE LINE - This was another unit that couldn't match the production they had after sitting out a whole season. The Aggies allowed under 100 rush ypg for 3 straight seasons, holding foes to 82 (2.8, 38 sk) in '17, 94 (3.0, 23 sk) in '18 then 80 (2.4) with 38 sacks in '19. Jermaine McDaniel was Preseason All-Big South heading into last year but he finished with just 11 tackles and the Aggies, while still solid, slipped to 107 (3.0) with 33 sacks. This year's only losses are Octavious Pringle (3 st, #13 tkl'r, 2.5 sk), Michael Branch (6 st, 13 tkl, 2 tfl) and Elijah Brown (2 st, #17 tkl'r). Three starters return and they have six back with starting experience including Henry Daniel who led the unit with 7.5 tfl's last year. They will be much better after knocking last year's rust off and should get back under 100 rush ypg allowed.

LINEBACKERS - Kyrin Howard led the team with 79 tackles and was #2 with 8 tfl's in '19. Last year Howard returned but missed 4 games and only posted 25 tackles. Jacob Roberts was king of the defense last year with 84 tackles and a team high 12 tfl's including 5 sacks. 2nd Team All Big South LB Roberts returns along with their #2 tackler Joseph Stuckey and Howard is back as well. Their lone loss is Alex Fumbah (6 st, #6 tkl'r, 5 tfl). Five of their top 6 are back and this is another top notch unit.

DEFENSIVE BACKS - NC A&T allowed 206 pass ypg (55.5%, 17-12) in '19. Against conference foes they only gave up 49.5% completions and 167 ypg. Last year they made the move to the Big South and allowed 240 pass ypg (58.9%, 16-7) and was #4 in pass defense efficiency. This year they lose Rover Richie Kittles (10 st, #3 tkl'r), CB Miles Simon (11 st, #5 tkl'r, 5 pbu) and FS Najee Reams (11 st, #4 tkl'r). They get their #10, #15 and #20 tacklers back and Pitt transfer Mychale Salahuddin started 2 games at the end of last year (12 tkl). They only have 1 starter back but last year they were coming in having not played in a year so they in a way so they could be better than expected.

SPECIAL TEAMS - In '19 Noel Ruiz made 23-27 fg's (L52) and Michael Rivers averaged 41.0 ypp on 46 punts with a 35.7 net. Last year they had to replace Ruiz. Andrew Brown made 10-16 fg's (L49). Rivers improved to 40.6 ypp on 51 punts and net improved to 36.8. Bhayshul Tuten averaged 18.3 KR. This year they lose their punter but are in better shape with Brown coming back.

COACHES - HC Sam Washington was A&T's DC from '11-'17 before taking over in '18 after the retirement of legendary coach Rod Broadway. Washington led the Aggies to their 11th MEAC Championship prior to Covid with 10 and 9 win seasons in his first 2 years. Washington was the DB's coach for 4 years at Grambling and spent 5 years at his alma-mater, Mississippi Valley St where he is DC and Assistant HC. He was the DC at NC Central for 8 years and got his coaching career started with an internship with the Tampa Bay Bucs under Tony Dungy. Coach Chris Barnette is in his 5th year as OC and has been the QB Coach since 2015. The new DC is Keith Willis who spent last year at DII Edinboro (PA) and was a DL coach for the Tennessee Titans from '13-'15. He also had stints as DLine coach at NCSt, Cincy, Boston College and Slippery Rock.

FORECAST

OFFENSE - NC A&T averaged 30 ppg and 366 ypg in '18, their first season under Sam Washington as HC. In '19 they put up 38 ppg and 447 ypg with RB Jah-Maine Martin leading the way with 1,446 and was 2nd Team All-American. They didn't play a single game in the fall or spring of '20-'21. The Aggies had to replace their QB last year and Martin didn't have the same explosiveness. They put up just 18 and 17 points in their first 2. A&T looked like the figured things out when they put up 37, 41 and 38 in a 3 game stretch but were shutout by Kennesaw St, held to 9 points by Hampton and didn't top 27 points the rest of the season. A&T put up just 23 ppg and 317 ypg and in their last 6 they averaged just 16.7 ppg and 262 ypg. This year they get QB Fowler back along with 4 starting OL. It's concerning that they closed last season so poorly but taking a whole year off caused rust so we could easily see them improving this year.

DEFENSE - This was one of the top defenses in the MEAC for years under Sam Washington as DC then continued that with him as HC. From '12-'19 then allowed over 21 ppg once, when they gave up a whopping 23 ppg in '16. In '18 they allowed just 14 ppg and 271 ypg. In '19 they slipped to 21 ppg and 286 ypg but did give up 44 in the Celebration Bowl vs Alcorn St. They had 8 starters back from '19's D last year but were clearly rusty when they gave up 29 & 45 points in their first 2. They held 5 of their next 9 foes to less than 20 points but allowed 30 points or more in the other 4. Overall they allowed 26 ppg and 347 ypg. This year they lose 4 of their top 6 tacklers but they still have solid depth at DL and LB. Six starters are back and after sitting out a whole season they should be back to holding foes to 21 ppg or less.

2022 - North Carolina A&T won three straight MEAC titles and four in five years before realigning to the Big South for this upcoming season. A&T seemed to outgrow the MEAC, even winning the Celebration Game against the SWAC champion four out of the five years it has existed, including the previous three. Before sitting out last spring, A&T had collected three straight HBCU national titles. The Aggies started the season 0-2, losing at Furman & Duke. They won 3 straight over weaker competition, all at home then went back on the road and lost to Kennesaw St & Hampton before falling to 3-5 after a home loss to Monmouth. At 0-4 on the road they won their last 2 road games, beating Charleston Southern by 3 and SCSt by 10. Their offense put up just 168 yards in their finale and they lost to Gardner-Webb to finish 5-6 and were -29 ypg. The year off and switching to a more competitive conference was too much to overcome but this year they should be much better with 12 starters back and they are the Media's pick to win the Big South. They host Bryant and Campbell but travel to Gardner-Webb in their finale which we think will decide the conference title.