

# NORTHERN COLORADO

## POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

**QUARTERBACKS** - UNC did not play in 2020, so going into 2021 they had to replace their starting QB who threw for 2,869 yds (61%, 16-12) in 2019. They brought in Michigan transfer Dylan McCaffrey (PS#4!) who is also the HC's son. McCaffrey started 10 games & led with just 1,332 yards (60.4%, 5-7) and he was also the #3 rusher (227, 3.9). Backup Conner Martin started the other game & he threw for 310 yards (60.4%, 3-1). This season the Bears return McCaffrey and backup Alec Lewis (194, 47.5%, 2-3) and they lose Martin. With a full year in the system under his belt we expect McCaffrey to have a better season throwing the ball.

**RUNNING BACKS** - Going into '21 the Bears lost their 3rd Tm Big Sky RB from '19 (890, 3.4, 10 td) who also had 239 receiving yards (7.2). Their only returning RB who saw time in '19 was Julien Ison and they added Michigan RB Tru Wilson who ran for a combined 585 yards in '18 & '19. Last fall Gene Sledge started 7 games and led the Bears with 482 rush yards (3.6) while Wilson finished as the #2 rusher (7 st, 228, 4.1). This season the Bears lose 4 of their top 5 RB's and the lone returnee is Brandon Belgrave (94, 4.1). However they do add Fresno St transfer Jordan Hornbeak and Miami, OH transfer David Afari. The Bears also add former Sacramento St RB Elijah Dotson (4 gm LY) who ran for 742 yards (4.9 ypc, 7 td) & also led with 70 receptions and 702 yards (10.0) in 2019! The influx in talented added via the portal should offset the talent lost & the position actually appears to be in better shape entering 2022.

**RECEIVERS** - The Bears return 4 of their top 6 receivers last fall led by WR Jarren Mitchell (740, 15.4, 2 td) & WR Sam Flowers (323, 12.0, 2 td). They also added a trio of FBS transfer WR's in Cassidy Woods (Wash St), Jonah Morris (Akron) & Dylan Thomas (TCU). Wood would lead the unit with 483 yards (11.2) while Thomas was #2 (383, 15.2) and J. Mitchell was #3 with 224 yards (6.4). This unit takes a pretty big hit this season as 5 of the top 7 WR's depart & they also lose their top TE. The Bears do add a Texas St and UNLV transfer at WR, but this unit will likely take a step back.

**OFFENSIVE LINE** - The OLine paved the way for 109 ypg (3.1 ypc) while allowing 46 sacks in 2018. They almost equaled their rush numbers (107, 3.1) in '19 but did reduce their sacks allowed to 28. Last year they lost 7 OL who combined for 27 starts in 2019. They returned 4 OL who combined for 33 starts. The rushing numbers last fall dropped to 109 ypg (3.3) but the OLine allowed just 13 sacks (3.6%) with 9 of those sacks allowed the F/4 games. Of the 8 players to start at least 1 game last season, only 2 return this fall. They do add N'Western transfer Wyatt Blake along with Will Knutsson & Kaleb Konigus from Penn St. The pass protection will likely take a step back, but after paving the way for just 109 ypg LY, there could be a slight increase in that number if this unit comes together quickly.

**DEFENSIVE LINE** - The DLine allowed 207 ypg rush in 18 and had just 8 sacks. In '19 they slipped to allowing 248 ypg rush but did increase their sack total to 15. The DLine returned their top 3 including DE's Joe Golen (3 st, #7 tkl'r, 3 sk) and Eddie Gonzales (12 st, #11, 2 sk). Last fall the rush defense did show improvements as they gave up 165 rush ypg (4.1) which was their first time allowing less than 200 rush ypg in a season since 2013! The pass rush also collected 23 sacks (7.1%). David Hoage led the unit with 69 tackles (9 st, 12.5 tfl, 10.5 sk) while Golden had 42 tackles (11 st, 4 tfl, 3 sk) and Gonzales recorded 30 tackles (8 st, 30 tkl, 3 sk). This fall the Bears return Hoage (1st Tm Big Sky), but lose Golden, Gonzales as well as Robert Moss (5 st, 27 tkl). UNC returns reserves Brooks Talkington (21 tkl) and Tava Finau (13 tkl) but losing a pair of starters may cause this unit to take a small step back in 2022.

**LINEBACKERS** - The LB unit last fall had to replace 4 of their top 6 tacklers. Their leading tackler who returns was Jace Bobo (4 st, #4 tkl'r, 2.5 tfl, 2 int). Last fall Bobo led the Bears with 87 tackles (11 st, 6 tfl, 3 pbu, 3 int) and was 4th Tm Big Sky. This fall UNC loses Bobo along with Duke transfer Xander Gagnon (8 st, 60 tkl, 4.5 tfl). The Bears do return LB's RJ Potts (8 st, 38 tkl, 3 tfl) along with Jacob Stanton (3 st, 32 tkl, 3 tfl) and Elijah Anderson-Taylor (1 st, 17 tkl, 3 tfl). This unit returns some experience, but with their top 2 starters gone, they will need some new starters to emerge this season.

**DEFENSIVE BACKS** - The secondary allowed 228 ypg pass (64.6%, 17-9) in '18 but slipped to allowing 259 ypg (62.5%) with a poor 31-12 ratio in '19. Last fall the Bears secondary lost 4 of their top 6 tacklers including 2 starters. However, the pass ypg improved as UNC allowed 209 pass ypg (61%) with a 14-7 ratio. The secondary was led by Jerone Jackson (10 st, 75 tkl, 5 tfl, 3 pbu) along with Nick Ciccio (11 st, 47 tkl, 5 pbu) and Greg Laday (11 st, 38 tkl, 3 pbu). The secondary loses 4 of 5 starters, with Ciccio being the only returnee. A trio of backups return this fall (41 tkl comb'd) and they add a Wyoming transfer and a UNLV transfer, but this unit is likely in for an increase in pass ypg with the loss of 4 starters in 2022.

**SPECIAL TEAMS** - The fg kickers in '19 combined to hit 11-16 fg's, with Collin Root (L/52) & Ben Raybon (L/45) both hitting 5-7 fg's. Last fall Raybon was the only kicker and he went just 8-14, but had a long of 57 yards & was 2-2 from 50+ yards! Noah Sol (38 punts) and Collin Root (24 punts) split the punting in 2019 and Sol averaged 43.7 yards and Root averaged 41.8 yards. The team net was 40.7! Last fall Devin Bale handled the majority of the punting and averaged 41.3 yards per punt & the team net was just 35.6 yards. The Bears lost their top KR and PR going into 2021 and DB Uryan Hudson led last fall with 217 KR yards (19.7) and 111 PR yards (6.2). This season the Bears get back P Bale and KR/PR Hudson, but will need a new FG kicker to emerge.

**COACHES** - Ed McCaffrey was hired in 2020 to take over as the HC but has only coached 1 season since UNC did not play football in 2020 and went 3-8 last fall. McCaffrey was a former All-American WR at Stanford & played 13 seasons in the NFL. McCaffrey is the father of NFL RB Christian & current UNC QB Dylan. The OC is Max McCaffrey (HC Ed's son) and this will be his 2nd season calling the plays. Max played WR at Duke & was a 3-year starter there. Scott Darnell

took over as the Bears DC in 2020 after spending 23 years coaching at various high schools. He was the DC at Valor HS (McCaffrey was HC) prior to this job in 2018-2019. Daryl Moe has been the ST Coordinator here since 2020.

## FORECAST

**OFFENSE** - UNC's offense in 2018 averaged 366 ypg (#10m Big Sky) while they scored 23.8 ppg, which also ranked #10 in the Big Sky. In 2019 UNC finished #13 in scoring (20.1 ppg) & #12 in total offense (356 ypg). Last fall the offense returned just 5 starters but added several FBS/FCS transfers. However, that did not matter much as the Bears ranked #13 in the Big Sky in total offense (275 ypg) and #13 in scoring offense (14.9 ppg). This season just 4 starters return, but the returnees have had a year in the system including former Michigan QB Dylan McCaffrey so some minor improvements with the scoring offense & total offense are expected.

**DEFENSE** - In 2018 the Bears finished #8 in the Big Sky in scoring (35.5 ppg) & #7 in total defense (436 ypg). In 2019 they slipped to #12 in scoring (37.8 ppg) & #12 in total defense (508 ypg). Last fall the defense returned 6 starters but just 4 of the top 9 tacklers. The UNC defense made a jump to allowing 374 ypg (#5 Big Sky), but they were #8 in the Big Sky in scoring defense (29.9 ppg). This season with just 3 starters back on defense and 9 of the top 13 tacklers gone, this unit is likely in for a year of regression.

**2022** - The Bears moved up to the FCS level in 2006 but have yet to make the playoffs and have not had a winning season since going 6-5 in 2016. New HC Ed McCaffrey has brought in several FBS/FCS transfers including his son at QB (PS#4!) as he looks to lead UNC to their first-ever playoff game. Last fall the defense held their own, but the offense is what let the Bears down as they were held to 116 ypg less than their foes allowed for the season (#122 FCS). While UNC's returning players have a year of experience in the system, they only bring back 7 starters overall. They open up vs Houston Baptist before traveling to Wyoming and then Lamar. The Bears do face 4 of the 5 Big Sky playoff teams from a year ago, avoiding only Montana. They play at E. Wash and Sac St & host Montana St and UC Davis. This Bears team is one of the least experienced teams in the conference this season & while we expect them to win a couple games, they will likely finish toward the bottom of the conference this season.