

NORTHERN IOWA PANTHERS

POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

QUARTERBACKS - In '19 Will McElvain started all 15 games and led the Panthers deep into the FCS playoffs, throwing for 2,778 (53%, 20-7) and was their #3 rusher with 372 (2.5). Last year UNI returned all 3 QB's who in the spring combined to throw for 1,371 (54%) with a poor 2-3 ratio & a combined 14 rush yds. McElvain battled injuries and only threw for 938 (51%, 1-2) and rushed for 77 yds (2.0, 2 td). Last year McElvain started the first 2 but lost the job to Michigan St transfer Theo Day (PS#31) who led the Panthers to 4 td's in the 3Q vs Sacramento St and he kept the job the rest of the way. Day threw for 2,316 (56.2%, 16-11) and rushed for 49 yards. McElvain (237, 56.1%, 1-2) went in the Portal. Day returns and Matt Morrissey (126, 35.7%, 0-2) is the only other QB with experience. Day has great size (6'5" 231) and gives the Panthers one of the most talented QB's in the Valley.

RUNNING BACKS - UNI had to replace their top rusher heading into spring but did return Tyler Hoosman (388, 4.2) and added Kansas transfer Dom Williams (PS#61) who had 441 rush in 3 years for the Jayhawks. Hoosman led in the spring with 373 (4.2) and Williams was #2 with 245 (3.6). Both Hoosman and Williams returned in the fall. Williams improved his ypc by over 2 yards and looked like the highly touted recruit he was supposed to be. He had 166 vs Western Illinois and led with 723 (6.0). Bradrick Shaw was #2 with 462 (4.2). Vance McShay was #3 with 331 (5.4). This year they lose Shaw and Hoosman (68, 2.3). This unit was drastically improved last year and they return their top 2 who were both 4th Team All-MVFC and combine to make a pretty special duo. They also add another Kansas transfer in Amauri Pesek-Hickson (PS#145, 145, 3.6) and Harrison Bey-Buie who led Eastern Illinois' leading rusher last year with 479 yards. This unit might be the deepest in the Missouri Valley now.

RECEIVERS - In '19 Isaiah Weston was #2 in the Valley with 1,053 and a fantastic 24.5 ypc! He also led the conference with 10 td catches. Weston returned in the spring but only had 7 catches for 152. Last year they returned their top 7 from spring including Kansas transfer Quan Hampton (PS#307, 356, 11.1), Deion McShane (295, 15.5) & Logan Wolf (202, 13.5). Weston returned to form. He had 181 vs North Dakota St's #1 ranked pass D and led with 883 (23.9!) with a team high 5 td's. Hampton was #2 despite missing 4 games. He had 430 (11.0) while McShane had 408 (11.7) and Sam Schnee had 402 (13.9). No other player topped 125. Weston departs (UFA CLE) but they still get 4 of their top 5 back. They add Minnesota transfer Pete Udoibok (PS#229), Iowa transfer Desmond Hutson (PS#131) and West Virginia transfer Devell Washington (PS#113). They have the experience to replace their top guy but need to stay healthy.

OFFENSIVE LINE - UNI rushed for just 111 (3.1) and allowed 33 sacks (8.6%) in '19. They lost Nick Ellis (12 st '19) for the season to injury and weren't much better in spring when they rushed for 103 (3.0) and allowed 14 sacks (7.2%). All 7 starters from spring returned for '21 and they improved to 141 (3.9) but still allowed 35 sacks (10.1%). This year UNI loses 1st Tm All-MVFC OT Trevor Penning (12 st) and OT Antoine Frazier (8 st). Three starters are back and they get Ellis back from injury. Six have starting experience so they should be better and we think the sack total finally goes down.

DEFENSIVE LINE - In '19 UNI allowed 110 rush ypg (2.8), their lowest since 2014 and had 41 sacks, their most since '14. They repated that feat in spring when they allowed 110 (3.2) rush ypg with 17 sacks. Last year their Dline returns their top 6 including all 4 starters led by MVFC DPOY, AADT Jared Brinkman (#4 tkl'r, 3.5 sk, 5.5 tfl), 2nd Tm MVFC DE Brawntae Wells (#6, 4.5 sk), DT Khristian Boyd (#8, 3.5 sk, 2 tfl) & DE Caden Houghtelling (#11, 3 sk, 3.5 tfl). This was a loaded unit so it's no surprise they allowed just 87 rush ypg (2.5) and had 36 sacks including 13 vs Western Illinois! This year UNI loses Brinkman (#4 tkl'r, 7 sk, 8 tfl), Tim Burch (#10 tkl'r, 4.5 sk, 10 tfl) and Wells (#19 tkl'r, 2 tfl). Four of their top 7 return including their #2 and #3 leaders in sacks and they add 3 inexperienced P5 transfers. Caden Houghtelling (#9 tkl'r, 5.5 sk, 4.5 tfl) and Devin Rice (#15 tkl'r, 5 sk) are both preseason 2nd Team All-MVFC. While not as good as last year this is still one of the best in the Valley.

LINEBACKERS - In '19 Bryce Flater finished 3rd in the FCS with 143 tackles! Spencer Cuvelier was #3 with 88 tackles in just 11 games (missed 4). Flater only played 1 game in spring due to injury. Cuvelier had 71 tackles in 7 games while Riley Van Wyhe was #2 with 54. Last year Their top 3 LB's returned along with Flater. This time Alfonzo Lambert, who had just 13 tackles in spring, led with 78 (5 tfl). Van Wyhe was #2 with 77 (4 tfl) but both of them depart this year. Cuvelier (#3 tkl'r, 4.1 tfl) and Flater (#5 tkl'r, 6 tfl) both return this year. They lose two of their top 4 but having two former 1st Team All-MVFC guys back is a good place to start.

DEFENSIVE BACKS - In '19 UNI was 5th in the Missouri Valley in pass D efficiency. They allowed 187 pass ypg (63.3%, 18-19). In spring they allowed just 176 pass ypg but 66% completions and fell to 6th in pass D efficiency. Last year they returned their top 5 DB's including their #1, #3, #7 and #9 tkl'rs. S Benny Sapp (orig Minnesota) led with 4 int's. They allowed 218 pass ypg (60.3%) but a 10-14 ratio and were #2 in the Valley in pass D efficiency. This year they lose CB Austin Evans (#7 tkl'r, 4 pbu, 3 int), Omar Brown (#11 tkl'r, 4 pd), Eric Mooney (#16 tkl'r, 1 int) and Zac Kibby (#17 tkl'r, 1 int). Sapp was 1st Team Preseason All-MVFC and Korby Sander (#6 tkl'r, 3 pd) was 2nd team. Four of their top 6 are back and this unit could be just as good.

SPECIAL TEAMS - The Special Teams unit returned all their top players including P Nate Murphy (35.5 net) & K/KO Matthew Cook who hit 15-20 FG (L/44) with 8 TB/32 KO giving them a very solid unit. Last year Cook made 19-22 fg's (L/55). Murphy averaged 38.9 and their net improved to 36.9. Quan Hampton had a 6.6 PR avg while Deion McShane averaged 18.7 KR. This year Murphy departs while Cook returns after being a 2nd Team FCS AA last year so this unit is solid again.

COACHES - Mark Farley is in his 22nd season as HC at UNI. He has a 167-92 career record and has led the Panthers to 13 trips to the FCS playoffs and owns 7 Missouri Valley Titles. First year OC Ryan Clanton came here from Venture College where he was OLine coach for 4 years. Former NFL LB Bryce Paup is on staff as the DLine Coach since 2018. They have no DC or ST's Coordinator on their roster.

FORECAST

OFFENSE - In 2018 the Panthers finished #7 in the MVFC in Scoring (25.6 ppg) despite being #9 in Total Offense (347 ypg). In 2019 while their numbers went down they improved to #5 in Scoring (21.0 ppg) but were again #9 in Total Offense (296 ypg). In the Spring they averaged 20 ppg and 300 ypg. Last year all 11 starters returned from the spring and they added P5 transfers at QB, RB and WR. UNI put up 24.9 ppg (#6 in MVFC) and 364 ypg (#7 in MVFC). This year the Panthers get 8 starters back on offense including QB Day and RB Williams. They do lose their top WR and a 1st Tm All-MVFC OL but get their next 4 receivers and 3 starters on the Oline back. This should be a solid offense and look for QB Day to have a better season now that he has experience.

DEFENSE - In 2018 Northern Iowa's Defense finished #3 in Scoring (21.3 ppg) & #5 in Total Defense (365 ypg). In 2019 despite improving overall they slipped to #4 in Scoring (17.7 ppg) but moved up to #3 in Total Defense (298 ypg). In the spring the Defense improved to #2 in Scoring (15.6 ppg) & #1 in Total Defense (290 ypg). This was a loaded defense last year with everyone back from spring. They allowed just 18 ppg and 305 ypg and held foes 108 ypg below their average. The only defense in the conference better than this one was North Dakota St who won the National Title. They get 8 of their top 15 tacklers back and 6 starters are back. They are down slightly but did add some inexperienced transfers so they could be the 2nd best D in the conference again.

2022 - UNI has won at least 7 games in all but 5 of the 21 years Mark Farley has coached, and one of those was the disjointed spring season of '21. Last year the Panthers nearly upset Iowa St in their opener, then won 3 straight including over Sacramento St, who made the FCS Playoffs, 34-16. They trailed #5 North Dakota St 13-10 at half and lost by 14 then lost by 13 after a poor 1st half vs #21 South Dakota. They beat #6 South Dakota St and #3 Southern Illinois in back to back weeksto get to 5-3. UNI was -3 TO's at Illinois St and lost by 7 despite a 315-164 yd edge then they allowed #16 Missouri St to score a GW td on a 55 yard td pass with :58 left. The Panthers blew out Western Illinois on Senior Day to finish 6-5 and received an At-Large bid to the FCS playoffs where they lost to #4 Eastern Washington 19-9. UNI was +58 ypg and +72 ypg in Missouri Valley play despite the .500 record. This year 14 starters are back. They miss NDSU so the schedule has already gotten easier and should once again contend for an FCS playoff spot. They were picked 5th by the Media.