

NORTHWESTERN ST



POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

QUARTERBACKS - Shelton Eppler threw for 3,587 yards (62%, 28-14) in 2019, but was gone & left here as the all-time leading passer (6,226 yd) so Bryce Rivers and Kaleb Fletcher would battle for the starting job in the spring of '21. Rivers led with 1,091 yards (53%, 6-2) while Fletcher threw for 374 yards (52%, 2-4) and Zachary Clement had 192 pass yards (47%, 0-1). Again this unit lost their top passer, but Fletcher and Clement both returned so the unit still had experience. Fletcher started 7 games last fall, but threw for 1,313 yds (63.6%, 8-6) and ran for 225 yds (2.7). Clement started 4 games and passed for 1,023 yds (56.4%, 6-4) and also showed solid mobility too with 287 rush yards (3.5, 7 td). The good news is for this unit is that they don't lose their top passer and will go into the 2022 season with two solid options at QB.

RUNNING BACKS - NWSt returned their top two RB's in 2019, but Jared West (735, 4.7 in '18) led with just 445 yds (3.1, 9 td). Stadford Anderson was #2 in '19 with 406 yds (4.2). Last spring the top two RB's were both gone, but in just 6 games new RB Scooter Adams led with 681 yds (8.0, 7 td), while Aubrey Scott was #2 with 215 (5.8). Adams was back last fall, but was limited to just 4 games, however finished as the team's #3 rusher (286, 5.2). Curtis Williams (4 st) would lead NWSt with 444 yds (5.8). QB's were the #2 and #4 rushers, and RB's here only had 2 rush td's all season. While they lose the #1 rusher from last fall, they get back Adams along with Sir Michael Veasley (194, 4.6) and Bryce Dealey (2 st, 107, 3.2) and if Adams can remain on the field this unit should definitely see an increase in production.

RECEIVERS - Going into '19 this unit lost the Southland Offensive POY (1117, 16.9, 13 td) along with along with the #2 WR (761, 14.9, 10 td). Their top returnee was Quan Shorts and he was the top guy with 994 yds (9.9, 11 td) while Akile Davis was #2 (762, 12.9) and Kendrick Price was #3 (372, 14.3). In the spring of 2021 the top 2 WR's were gone again. Price returned but only had 66 yds, and the new #1 was Javon Antonio with 521 yds (16.8) and Gavin Landry finished #2 (227, 13.4). Last fall NWSt lost their top guy again, but former New Mexico WR Jay Griffin would take over as the top guy (11 st, 548, 10.9) while Price was #2 (11 st, 430, 15.4) and Landry was #3 (9 st, 289, 8.5). This unit again takes a hit as they lose their top 4 receivers. The top two WR's who return are Stanley King (210, 15.0), and Dylan Fullen (133, 8.3). NWSt does have experience back at QB, but they will have to gel with the new receivers if this unit is to be productive.

OFFENSIVE LINE - NWSt's OLine only paved the way for 95 rush ypg (3.2) in 2019, and they allowed 26 sacks (4.9%). In the spring of '21 the Demons rushing numbers jumped to 168 ypg (5.3), but they did allow 17 sacks in 6 games (6.8%). Last fall the Demons returned 3 starters on the OLine and the

rushing numbers dipped a bit to 154 ypg (4.0) and the sacks allowed jumped up to 32 (8.5%). Last fall 12 different players started at least 1 game on the OLine and this season 9 of them return. However, they do lose C Jakob Sell, who was 3rd Tm Southland, and Khalil Corbett-Canada, who started 5 games at LT last fall. Still, this unit has quite a bit of experience returning, and with top RB Adams returning in 2022, we expect the rushing totals to increase.

DEFENSIVE LINE - NWSt's DLine gave up 157 rush ypg (4.0) and collected 28 sacks in 2019. In the spring of 2021 they did allow 170 rush ypg (3.9) but had 19 sacks in 6 games (9.1%). This unit returned all major contributors last fall, but the rush defense took a small step back (180, 4.5) but the Demons did collect 30 sacks (8.9%) however 11 of them came in the season finale at McNeese. DE Isaiah Longino led the DLine with 37 tackles (11 st, 9.5 sk) and was 1st Tm Southland. NT Donovan Green also had a solid year (11 st, 27 tkl) as did DE John Daigle (2 st, 24 tkl). Those three all return for the Demons this season. However, they lose Nathalohn Nanai (2 st, 17 tkl, 2 tfl) and Darius Whitfield (2 st, 13 tkl). While the top 3 are back, the depth takes a big hit as just 4 of the top 9 return. The starting unit has talent, but new players will need to step up & provide depth.

LINEBACKERS - After giving up 473 ypg and 30 ppg in the spring of 2021, NWSt lost two of their top LB's going into the fall. The defense did allow over 500 yards in 5 games, but held 5 teams to under 350 yards and overall allowed 443 ypg and 34 ppg. Jomard Valsin led the team with 68 tackles (10 st, 6.5 tfl, 3 sk) and was 1st Tm Southland. Jared Pedraza was the #2 tackler (6 st, 6 sk, 2 pbu) and was 2nd Tm Southland. Both Valsin and Pedraza return this season, along with Race Moser (8 st, 32 tkl). The lone starter gone is Kyle Moore (10 st, 47 tkl, 6.5 tfl) who was 4th Tm Southland. With 5 of the top 8 LB's returning in 2022 including 3 starters, this unit should be improved and NSWT looks to have an experienced front seven this season.

DEFENSIVE BACKS - The Demons pass defense allowed 257 ypg (63.7%) and collected 14 int's in 2019. The pass defense in the spring of '21 gave up 302 ypg (62.2%) and collected 5 int's in 6 games. Last fall the pass D improved a bit, allowing 263 ypg (62.6%) and picked off 7 passes. Safeties PJ Herrington (8 st, 53 tkl, 5 tfl, 2 int) and Keenan Leachman (9 st, 37 tkl, 3 pbu) led the unit in tackles. CB's Shemar Bartholomew (8 st, 29 tkl, 6 pbu, 2 int, 3rd Tm Southland) and William Hooper (10 st, 31 tkl, 1 int) also had productive seasons. The Demons secondary returns 8 of the top 9 players this season including all 4 starters. With a wealth of experience coming back this fall, we expect this secondary to have their best pass defense since 2015 when they allowed 210 pass ypg (58.4%).

SPECIAL TEAMS - In the spring of '21 Eddie Godina went 6-12 with a long of 47, and 4 of his 6 misses were blocked. Scotty Roblow was the new punter in the spring of '21 and he averaged 41.7 yds with a net of 34.2 yds. Last fall Godina made 5-10 fg's (L/40) with 2 attempts blocked, and Roblow averaged 40.3 yds per punt (37.4 net). In the spring of '21 Donovan Duvernay led with 509 KR yards (28.3) and NWSt had -4 PR yards all season. Last fall Duvernay was the top KR again with 494 yards (19.8) and NWSt had 57 PR yds. Both Godina and Roblow are back this season, but will need to find a new KR this season as they lose their top return man. Six of Godina's 11 missed fg's have been blocked, so if he can convert some of those into makes, the kicking game will be in great shape.

COACHES - Brad Laird enters year five as the HC at Northwestern St, and is just 12-28 in his first four seasons here. Laird spent time as the DC here in 2017 and 2008-2011. Laird also played QB here from 1991-95 and had the all-time passing record (6,037 yds) until it was broken in 2019. The new OC here is Cody Crill, who spent the 4 previous seasons as Incarnate Word's OC where he coached two AA QB's. Weston Glaser is the new DC for NWSt, and spent the previous 4 seasons as the DC at Campbell. NWSt does not list a ST coordinator.

FORECAST

OFFENSE - Since 2015 the NWSt offense has only averaged over 400 ypg in a season twice. In 2017 the Demons averaged 364 ypg and 23 ppg as they were -76 ypg. In '18 the offense took a jump up to 419 ypg and 28 ppg and their offense put up 16 ypg more than their foes allowed. The offense took a small step back in 2019, putting up 383 ypg and 26 ppg and they gained 12 ypg less than their foes allowed. The offense in the spring of '21 put up 448 ypg, but that average was propped up by their 707 yds in the season finale. Last fall the offense only put up 362 ypg and 19 ppg and were held to 50 ypg less than their foes allow. This season 5 starters return, but they have experience at QB and RB, plus 3 starters back on the OLine. The big ? is at WR as the top 4 are all gone. If new WR targets emerge, the offense should put up better numbers than last season.

DEFENSE - The last time NWSt's defense allowed less than 400 ypg in a season was 2013! In 2017 the defense gave up 440 ypg and 31 ppg. Those numbers increased in 2018 to 475 ypg and 35 ppg and the defense allowed foes to gain 76 ypg above their season average. In 2019 the defense showed improvement, giving up 414 ypg, but again gave up 35 ppg. In fact, the defense allowed 349 ypg over the last 6 games. The spring season in '21 saw NWSt give up 473 ypg and 30 ppg. Last fall 12 of the top 14 tacklers were, but there was not much improvement as they gave up 443 ypg and 34 ppg and allowed foes to gain 33 ypg above their season average. This season 12 of the top 13 tacklers are back, but NWSt does have a new DC. However, we think this unit will show some improvement with 9 starters returning.

2022 - Northwestern St has been in the Southland Conference since 1987, but have not won the conference outright since 1998. The Demons have not made the FCS playoffs since 2004, and have not had a winning season since 2008! In 2019 NWSt was -32 ypg and -10 ppg and improved that slightly to -24 ypg and -6 ppg in the spring of '21. Last fall the Demons were -81 ypg and -15 ppg. This season NWSt does return 14 starters including 9 on defense. They open the season at FCS powerhouse Montana, then face Grambling, and then face Southern Miss on the road. Their first home game is vs Lamar, then they host Nicholls, but 3 of their final 4 Southland games are on the road. NWSt has new coordinators, who can hopefully begin to turn the offense & defense around but we don't see the Demons contending for the Southland title, though they should be competitive in most of their games.