

# UTAH TECH

## POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

**QUARTERBACKS** - In 2019, which was Dixie St's last year in D-II, Kody Wilestead started 5 games and led with 1640 yards (55%, 18-7) while also rushing for 214 yards (4.5). Keaton Mott also started 5 games and threw for 1274 yards (54%, 10-2) while Tanner Hammond also played in 7 games and threw for 450 yards (56%, 3-1). Those three QB's were all back in the spring of '21 and this was their first season as an FCS member. Wilestead started all 5 games in the spring and passed for 1339 yards (57%, 10-0) and also ran for 113 yards (3.1). Kobe Tracy was the backup and saw time in 2 games (155, 42%, 2-0). In the fall of '21 Wilestead started the first two games, but UNLV transfer Kenyon Oblad took over and started the next 4 games. Tracy would start the final 5 games and led with 1664 yards (61%, 8-8) while Oblad was #2 (878, 51%, 5-10) and Wilestead finished with 244 (50%, 0-2). Wilestead is gone this season, but Oblad and Tracy come back and they also add former Hawai'i QB Boone Abbott. Tracy looks like he could be the Trailblazers best option & if he stays healthy he should easily top 2000 pass yards.

**RUNNING BACKS** - Sei-J Lauago led Dixie St with 575 rush yards in 2019 (10 st, 575, 5.3), while D'Arman Notoa was #2 (308, 4.1). The Trailblazers lost Notoa for the spring '21 season, but they returned both Notoa and Andrew Kannley-Robles (296, 4.6 in '19). However, freshman Quali Conley started all 5 games and gained 400 rush yards in 5 games (4.8, 4 td) and had 207 rec yds. The only other RB to record rushing stats in the spring was Nick Floyd (112, 5.9). Conley returned last fall, but it was Kannley-Robles who would take over as the top rusher, gaining 729 yards (4.9, 7 td) while Conley was #2 with 263 yards (3.8). Kannley-Roberts (2nd Tm WAC) departs, but Conley returns and DJ Oats (Colorado) or Malakai Fakahua (BYU) could make an impact as the backup RB, as could Zealand Matagi.

**RECEIVERS** - Dejuan Dantzler was the #1 receiver in 2019 (8 st, 847, 18.8, 7 td), but he did not return for the spring season, along with #3 receiver Kasey Allen (7 st, 446, 17.2) and #5 receiver Xavier Smith (6 st, 242, 17.3). However, 6 receivers who topped 100 yards in '19 were back in the spring, led by Jalen Powell (#2 rec, 5 st, 557, 12.7 in '19) and TE Chase Hess (#4 rec, 8 st, 354, 15.4 in '19). However, it was Deven Osborne (6'8" 200) took over as the top guy (441, 14.7) while Powell was #2 (305, 14.5), and TE Chase Hess finished with 201 yards (15.5). Both Osborne and Powell were back last fall, as were 6 of the top 8 receivers. Osborne was limited to 4 games in the fall, while former Arizona St WR Keith Davis would lead the Trailblazers with 479 yards (13.7) and was 4th Tm WAC, while Michael Moten was #2 (422, 14.1, 3rd Tm WAC). Rickie Johnson was 3rd Tm WAC & TE Cade Veach was 4th Tm WAC. Of the 7 receivers to top 100 yards, 6 return this season along with Osborne. The lone departure is Powell (4 st, 242, 8.1), and if Utah Tech can get stability at QB and their top guys remain healthy this unit should show some improvement.

**OFFENSIVE LINE** - Dixie St ran for 148 ypg (4.3) in 2019 and allowed 24 sacks in 11 games. In the spring season their rush ypg dropped some to 122 ypg (4.2) and they gave up 6 sacks in 5 games. With 4 starters back entering the fall season, this unit returned some experience, but they were now playing a full FCS schedule and Dixie St topped 100 yds only 3 times all season and ran for just 88 ypg (3.0) on the year and they gave up 36 sacks (7.8%). They were led by 3rd Tm WAC RG Walter Pongia (11 st) and 3rd Tm WAC LT Ty Hyde (8 st). This unit loses just 1 player who started 4 games last season, so they again return an experienced OLine and should definitely show improvement with a year of FCS competition under their belts.

**DEFENSIVE LINE** - Dixie St's DLine allowed 149 rush ypg in 2019 and collected 40 sacks! Dylan Hendrickson led the team with 10 sacks (11 st, #11 tkl'r). Going into the spring season in '21 Dixie St returned Hendrickson along with Tariq Wright (8 st, #10 tkl'r, 3.5 tfl), but they lost a trio of DL who comb'd for 6 starts and 76 tackles in '19. In the shortened spring season the Trailblazers would allow 224 rush ypg (4.7) and collected 9 sacks. The leading tackler was Isaac Fotu (5 st, #5 tkl'r, 5.5 tfl) and Wright also started 5 games and was t-#10 tackler. Hendrickson started 4 games but only had 5 tackles. In the fall of '21 Dixie St brought back 3 of the top 4 DL, but in their first full FCS season they gave up 240 rush ypg (5.7) and collected 22 sacks (6.4%). Syrus Webster led the unit with 40 tackles (8 st, 5 tfl) while Fotu was t-#7 tackler (11 st, 4 tfl, 3 pbu). Coming into '22 the DLine returns Webster (3rd Tm WAC) along with Bradley Brown (18 tkl, 3 sk) and Hendrickson (11 tkl, 2.5 tfl). They lose Fotu (4th Tm WAC) and Livingston Paogofie (5 st, 14 tkl, 4 sk, 3 tfl). This DLine is still in decent shape, but would benefit from Hendrickson getting back to his 2019 form.

**LINEBACKERS** - In their final season as a D-II member in 2019, the Trailblazers were led by LB's Malaki Malaki (7 st, t-#2 tkl'r, 6 tfl) and Syrr Barnes (4 st, #4 tkl'r, 6 tfl) and they allowed 343 ypg and 22 ppg. Going into spring of '21 Dixie St returned Malaki, but lost Barnes along with 2 other LB's that combined for 7 starts, 80 tackles, and 4 tfl. In the spring Dixie St gave up 393 ypg and 25 ppg. Malaki was the top tackler (4 st, 39 tkl, 3.5 tfl) while Mark Lopez was #2 (5 st, 37 tkl). Overall the top 6 LB's returned going into the fall season, but the defense allowed 470 ypg and 40 ppg & Dixie St allowed foes to gain 71 ypg above their season average. Malaki was the #2 tackler (10 st, 94 tkl, 9.5 tfl) and was 1st Tm WAC. Will Leota was the #3 tackler (10 st, 54 tkl, 4.5 tfl) and he returns in '22 along with Malaki. Kaejin Smith-Bejgrowicz played the NB role last fall (7 st, #6 tkl'r, 3.5 tfl) as is back this season. With all 3 main starters back this defense has a chance to take a step forward this season as long as they remain healthy.

**DEFENSIVE BACKS** - Dixie St's pass defense gave up 194 pass ypg in 2019, and Darrius Nash led the team with 73 tackles (4.5 tfl, 6 pbu, 2 int). Going into the spring '21 season Nash was back, but they lost the #2 tackler (11 st, 8.5 tfl, 7 pbu) and the #9 tackler (8 st, 3.5 tfl, 12 pbu, 7 int). Last spring Dixie St gave up 169 pass ypg and picked off 3 passes in 5 games. Nash was the #4 tackler (5 st, 30 tkl, 3 tfl, 4 pbu) and Malini Ti'a led the DB's with 31 tackles (4 st). Going into last fall every DB that started in the spring was back and they allowed 230 pass ypg (59%) and they collected 9 int's. S Tyrell Grayson led the team with 103 tackles (10 st, 3.5 tfl, 5 pbu, 2 int) while Nash was the #4 tackler (8 st, 3 tfl). Colby Williams (t-#7 tackler, 10 pbu) and Devyn Perkins (#9 tackler, 6 pbu, 2 int) both started 10 games at CB and they both are back along with Grayson and Nash. With 4 starters back, this secondary has all the makings to make a steady improvement this season.

**SPECIAL TEAMS** - In '19 James Baird hit 11-13 fg (L/42) and Keaton Mott averaged 38.1 yds per punt (32.4 net). Both returned for the spring '21 season but they lost their top KR and PR. Baird hit 7-11 fg (L/50) in the spring, and the new punter was Johnny Borashan who averaged 35.3 yds per punt (33.0 net). The punt and kick return was limited in the spring (200 total return yds in 5 gms). In the fall both K and P were back and but Connor Brooksby was the new K and he hit 10-17 fg's (L/50, 2 blk'd) while Andrew Day was the new P and he averaged 41.3 yds per punt (37.3 net). WR Fisher led with 303 KR yds (23.3) and he returns along with both K and P. K Brooksby needs to work on his accuracy, but if that improves this unit should have a better season.

**COACHES** - Paul Peterson has been the head coach at Dixie St (now Utah Tech) since 2019 and has a record of 11-16. Before coming here Peterson was the HC at Snow College and went 18-4 in two seasons there. From '12-'17 Peterson was the OC at Sacramento St. The new OC here is Craig Stutzmann, who spent the past two seasons as the co-OC and QB coach at Washington

St. Prior to that Stutzmann was the pass game coord and QB coach at Hawai'i from '16-'19. Shane Hunter is one of the co-DC's here after spending 2016-2021 as the ILB and S coach at Virginia. The other co-DC is Misi Tupe who has been here since 2019. Before here Tupe spent 3 seasons at Snow College, with 2 of those years coming under Peterson. Mike Fassel (son of former NFL coach Jim Fassel) is the ST coordinator here.

## FORECAST

**OFFENSE** - Dixie St's offense put up 377 ypg and 26.7 ppg in 2017. The offensive numbers jumped to 459 ypg and 31.1 ppg in 2018 and they took another jump in 2019 as the offense put up 455 ypg and 34.5 ppg. In the spring of '21 the Trailblazers put up 421 ypg and 31.4 ppg. They had talent back at each position on offense entering the fall of '21 but they struggled to move the ball as they averaged 340 ypg and just 18.6 ppg. This season 10 starters are back on offense including all 5 OLine starters. We anticipate this offense building consistency in the offense and having a more productive season.

**DEFENSE** - The Trailblazers defense gave up 372 ypg and 26.7 ppg in 2017. In 2018 the Trailblazers defense allowed 436 ypg and 31.1 ppg and in 2019 those numbers fell to 343 ypg and 22.4 ppg. In 5 games in the spring of '21 they allowed 393 ypg and 24.8 ppg. Last fall 13 of the top 14 tacklers were back, but they did face a full FCS schedule and they surrendered 470 ypg and 39.6 ppg. This season they return 9 starters including all 4 in the secondary, and we think with a normal offseason under their belt, this defense should take a step forward.

**2022** - Dixie St moved up to D-II level in 2006 but did not have their first winning season until 2016 but in 2018 went 7-4 and in 2019 went 8-3 in their final season before moving up to the FCS level. As of July 1st 2022 Dixie St is switching their name to Utah Tech, but will still be nicknamed the Trailblazers. They joined the WAC upon moving up to the FCS, but are ineligible to make the FCS playoffs until 2024 due to NCAA rules. The Trailblazers have just 1 win against an FCS foe since moving up and that was their opening game in the spring of 2021 season at Tarleton St. Last season Dixie St was -129 ypg and -21 ppg and were -13 TO's for the season. This season Utah Tech does have 19 starters back and they will go through a normal offseason and now know what it's like to go through a normal FCS schedule. However they open with 3 of their first 4 games on the road with trips to Sacramento St, Weber St and Southern Utah. They also face Northern Iowa and SF Austin on the road, and those teams both made the playoffs last fall. Overall we feel like Utah Tech will be more competitive in their WAC games this season and could pick up a win or two, but this conference has a lot of talent and it could take a few years for Utah Tech to build their team up and be competitive for a conference title.