VMI KEYDETS

POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

QUARTERBACKS - QB Reece Udinski led the team in passing in 2018 and in 2019 threw for 3,276 (63.9%, 19-5). Last year in the first 4 games he threw for 1,082 (71.5%, 7-2) but then tore his ACL. Seth Morgan stepped right in, throwing for 343.5 ypg (1374, 71.35, 10-4) and topped 300 yards in 3 of his 4 starts. Last year Morgan returned while Udinski transferred to Maryland. Morgan started 9 games and dipped to just 217.5 ypg, throwing for 2,175 (61.7%, 14-11) with 191 rush (2.7). He did throw for 463 vs Samford and 415 vs Furman. Collin Ironside started 2 games and saw action in 7. He threw for 623 (69.1%) with a 4-2 ratio. Both Morgan and Ironside return. In Morgan's first 3 starts last year he threw for 140 ypg but in their last 4 he threw for 333 ypg. Look for Morgan to be more consistent and easily top last year's numbers.

RUNNING BACKS - Last spring FMI had to fill the large shoes of RB Alex Ramsey (1326, 5.5). Korey Bridy appeared on his way to a solid year with B2B 100 yard games vs Mercer and Samford then suffered an ankle injury and had just 31 yds the last 4 games. He still led with 349 (3.8) while Rashad Raymond (215, 3.7) was #2 rusher. Both return last year, making this unit much more experienced. Bridy missed 3 games including the last 2. He had 171 vs Wofford and 165 vs UT Chatanooga and led with 654 (4.7, 80 rec) and had a team high 8 td's. Raymond had 163 vs Mercer and 105 vs WCarolina. He was #2 with 492 and a team high 5.5 ypc (71 rec). Hunter Rice added 289 (4.4). Their top 3 all return this year and their depth is key considering Bridy has missed time each of the last 2 years.

RECEIVERS - Last spring VMI returned their star WR in Jakob Herres who led with 1,091 (15.2) in 2019. They did lose their #2 (648, 12.7) and #4 (323, 6.5 RB) receivers. Herres had an amazing season as in just 8 games he had 978 (12.2)! Michael Jackson (5 rec '19) emerged as the #2 man with 394 (10.9) and Max Brimigion (#5, 253, 10.5 '19) was #3 with 291 (9.1). TE Aidan Trombly was #7 with 11 catches. The great news last year was all 4 returned! This time it was Jackson who led with 695 (13.6). Leroy Thomas was a surprising #2 with 557 (10.1). Herres missed 3 games and only finished with 500 (10.6). Brimigion added 333 (11.9). Jackson and Herres depart this year. They go from their top 4 returning to losing #1 and #3 so they are down a few notches.

OFFENSIVE LINE - VMI lost one starter on the Oline but coach Wachenheim called it the biggest strongest O-ine that he has had and they returned 4 starters. The leader was OL Marshall Gill who was voted preseason 1st team SoCon. The Keydets went from 119 (3.4) rush ypg with 18 sacks in the spring to 160 (4.2) and 22 sacks in the fall. They were fortunate with all 5 starters staying healthy and starting all 11 games. This year they lose 3rd Tm All SoCon C Nick Harnett, LT Jacob Peace and RT Shane Strand. They go from 4 starters back to 2 and their excellent health last year means they didn't have much need for depth so this is their biggest question coming into the season.

DEFENSIVE LINE - VMI allowed 200+ rush ypg each season from '12-'19 with one exception in '16 when they "only" gave up 187 (4.6). In '19 VMI allowed 249 rush ypg (5.4) and had 20 sacks. This was the most improved unit in the spring when they allowed 168 (3.7) and had 26 sacks (12.7%). Last year they lost their #9 tackler who had 4 sacks. The Keydets slipped back to '19's standard, allowing 233 rush ypg (5.2) while posting just 13 sacks (4.2%). This year they lose DE Warren Dabney (11 st, #6 tkl'r, 3.5 tfl), Jaylon Haney (7 st, #13 tkl'r) and Kandler Martin (#10 tkl'r, 5.5 tfl). Only 3 of their top 6 return from this 3 man unit and they aren't likely to get back under 200 ypg allowed this year.

LINEBACKERS - Last year VMI lost their #2 tackler but returned the Preseason Defensive Player of the Year in the SoCon in Stone Snyder (#1 tkl'r, 8 sk in spg). Snyder led the entire conference with 120 tackles and 10.9 tackles per game. Snyder returns along with their #4 and #9 tacklers. They do lose OLB Ethan Caselberry (5 st, #3 tkl'r, 8 pbu) and Carter Johnson (9 tkl). With Snyder back this is once again one of the top LB corps in the SoCon.

DEFENSIVE BACKS - VMI gave up 246 pass ypg in '19 (59.2%) then in the spring they improved to just 198 pass ypg allowed (54.1%). Last year VMI lost their #3 and #4 tacklers. They allowed 211 pass ypg (54%, 13-5) and was 5th in the SoCon in pass defense efficiency. This year VMI loses backup CB Will Bunton (5 st, #14 tkl'r, 4 pbu). The rest of the unit returns including their #2, #5, #7, #11, #12, #16 and #20 tacklers. With 7 of their top 8 returning this is once again a strengh and they should climb up the conferences pass D rankings.

SPECIAL TEAMS - P Jack Culbreath had a 38.7 avg last spring (36.3 net) and was back. Jerry Rice hit a solid 11-14 FG in the spring with a long of 44 and is also back. Chance Knox was the top KR (22.7) and PR (8.2) and he was back. This unit was average last year but should be improved with everyone back. Rice made 17-19 fg's with a long of 49. Culbreth averaged 43.7 ypp but their team net dropped to 33.6 thanks to a 13.0 PR average allowed. Korey Bridy evrages 21.1 KR. The whole unit returns including 1st Tm All SoCon Kicker Jerry Rice. If their punting and coverage improve then they are in the running for SoCon's best ST's unit in the conference.

COACHES - Scott Wachenheim enters his 8th season as VMI's head coach. He led the Keydets to their first conference title since 1977 during their spring season of '21 when they went 6-1 in SoCon play and was named FCS Coach of the Year by the AFCA. He was also Virginia's OL Coach from '11-'14 , their TE Coach in '10 and Liberty's OC from '06-'08 and Rice's OC from '01-'05. Parker Ashford has been promoted to OC after spending the last 2 years as QB Coach. He spent 3 years as an offensive asst at Vandy. Nick Reveiz was a W/O at Tennessee that ended up being a 2x Team Captain. He was the RB Coach and LB Coach at Carson-Newman from '13-'16 and spent the last 5 years at Albany State where he was DC for the nation's #1 scoring defense in Division 2. Chris Moore is the 4th year ST Coordinator.

FORECAST

OFFENSE - In 2016, Wachenheim installed the Air Raid Offense at VMI and they dropped from 387 ypg to 347 ypg. Year two was a nightmare with the QB's hitting just 52.3% and a paltry 219 ypg of offense for the year and in SoCon as well. They improved to 58%, 28 ppg and 399 ypg in SoCon play in 2018, 66%, 33 ppg and 418 ypg in 2019. Last spring despite losing their QB after 4 games it was 73.5%, 431 ypg and 30 ppg in league play! In the fall they had 10 starters back and put up 31.3 ppg/419 ypg. Six starters are back this year including QB Morgan. The Oline is their biggest concern and they are replacing their OC but Wachenheim has this offense performing consistently since he took over so we don't see much of a drop coming.

DEFENSE - In 2018 the VMI defense allowed 522 ypg in SoCon play and 47 ppg including 275 (5.7) on the ground. In 2019 they gave up 237 ypg rush (5.3) and 497 ypg and 37 ppg in SoCon play. Last spring they changed the emphasis of the defense to stopping the run which helped them allow just 168 on the ground and 366 overall with 22 ppg. Last year they had 5 starters back. VMI's rush D struggled again, allowing 233 rush ypg and they gave up 444 and 33 points per game. Thirteen of their top 20 tacklers return. Their pass D was solid last year and if their run D matches it then they will make significant strides.

2022 - What a Cinderella story VMI was last spring and that is precisely why their coach was rightfully named FCS coach of the year. The big question this year is can VMI maintain their success for a 2nd straight season. As long as the offense kept WR Herres and QB Morgan healthy we said they would be potent. The D lost 5 of the top 7 tacklers in a year when all other defenses have everyone back. This team rated at the top of my Going Down in the Stock Market Indicator and they now have a target on their back after living as the underdog forever. started 3-1 with the loss at Kent ST. They won 3 straight before losing B2B road games at ETSU by 7 & at Furman by 6. In their finale WCU outgained VMI 618-428 and the Keydets lost 52-24. VMI was -7 TO's last year. They get 13 starters back this year. After finishing -30 ypg last year they are expected to be towards the bottom of a very competitive conference. They have tough road games at UTC, Samford and WCU along with an opener a Wake Forest. They host SoCon Champs ETSU and Mercer who is expected to contend for the SoCon Title as well. With 6 home games they've got a shot to match last year's 6 win total and we see them in the middle of the pack in a very competitive conference.