WEBER ST

QUARTERBACKS - Bronson Barren, who threw for 1,071 yards (55%, 7-2) in the spring of 2021 was back last fall. They also returned their backup in former MTSU QB Randall Johnson (170, 62%, 3-1). Bronson started 8 games for the Wildcats last fall and led with 1,520 pass yards (60.9%, 8-5). Bronson was sidelined 3 games with an injury and Kylan Weisser started 2 of those games & was the #2 passer with 545 (62.5%, 4-2) while Johnson started 1 game and was the #3 passer (218, 50%, 0-1). This fall Bronson is back for his 3rd season as the starter and Weisser returns along with Cooper Creyton (5-9, 56 yds, 2-0 last fall) and this unit looks to be in pretty good shape. If Bronson can remain healthy we expect this season to be his best yet.

RUNNING BACKS - The Wildcats They lost their #3 rusher (303, 6.9, 3 td) going into last fall but returned everyone else who had a carry in the spring led by RB's Josh Davis (5 st, 386, 5.8, 1 td) & Dontae McMillan (1 st, 376, 6.0, 5 td). Despite only starting 1 game last fall McMillan would lead Weber St in rush yards (475, 5.6) while Davis only played in 6 games, but was #2 (5 st, 281, 4.4). Kris Jackson ended LY as the #3 rusher (4 st, 229, 3.6, 6 td). The Wildcats lose their #4 rusher Dave Jones (2 st, 191, 4.3) but overall return 4 of their top 5 rushers this fall & we anticipate Weber St having an even better season rushing the ball.

RECEIVERS - The Wildcats returned everyone who had a reception in the spring of 2021 led by Ty MacPherson (395, 20.8), Rashid Shaheed (251, 12.0, 3 td) & TE Justin Malone (206, 15.9, 3 td). Last fall Shaheed led the Wildcats with 700 yards (10 st, 17.9, 4 td) and was 2nd Tm Big Sky. MacPherson was the #2 receiver (11 st, 478, 12.9) while Hadley Haze was #3 with 179 yards (13.8). This fall the Wildcats lose their #1 and #4 receivers, but overall they return 6 of the top 8 receivers including TE's Hayden Meacham (150, 7.9, 4 td) and Justin Malone (144, 8.0). With a veteran QB back along with several of the top targets, this unit is poised to have a productive season in 2022.

OFFENSIVE LINE - The Wildcats OLine paved the way for 207 ypg (5.1 ypc) while allowing 12 sacks (7.8%) in the spring of '21. The unit lost a 2-game starter but returned 7 OL last fall who combined for the other 28 starts. The OLine had an up & down season when it came to the run game as 3 times they topped 200 yards but were held to under 100 yards in 4 games. For the season Weber St ran for 150 ypg (4.1) and the OLine allowed 23 sacks (6.9%) but 13 of those sacks came in 3 games. This fall the Wildcats bring back 4 players who started on the OLine last fall including 3 starters led by 1st Tm Big Sky LT Noah Atagi. Losing the starting C and RG is tough, but there is still plenty of start experience back & we expect this OLine to have a solid season paving the way for the run once again.

DEFENSIVE LINE - After allowing just 120 ypg rush (#1 Big Sky) & 3.4 ypc in 2019, the Wildcats DLine allowed 141 rush ypg & 3.6 ypg last spring, while their sack total went from 46 sacks in 15 games in '19 to just 16 sacks in 6 games last spring. The DLine returned their top 11 tacklers last fall & this DLine was loaded with talent & experience. The run defense was stellar for the majority of last fall as they allowed just 110 ypg (3.4) and they collected 23 sacks (6.7%) with 7 sacks coming against Cal Poly. DE George Tarlas led the DLine with 55 tackles (10 st, 5 sk) and was 2nd Tm Big Sky while DT Jared Schiess (11 st, 37 tkl, 6 sk, 3 tfl) was 1st Tm Big Sky. Both Tarlas and Schiess depart this season DE's Mitchel Maxfield (L/6 st, 24 tkl, 3 tfl) and McKade Mitton (4 st, 15 tkl, 2.5 tfl). The lone starter back on the DLine is DT Sione Lapuaho (10 st, 18 tkl) & DT Doug Schiess (22 tkl, 4.5 tfl) is back too. But with three starters gone this unit will likely take a step back in 2022.

LINEBACKERS - Last fall the LB unit returned their top 4 led by Conner Mortensen (6 st, #1 tkl'r, 11.5 tfl) and Sherwin Lavaka (5 st, #4, 3.5 tfl). Mortensen again led this unit in tackles last fall (11 st, 3 sk, 3 tfl) and was 2nd Tm Big Sky. Lavaka was the #5 tackler (11 st, 42 tkl, 3 tfl) and Reid was the #7 tackler (5 st, 36 tkl, 3 tfl). This fall the Wildcats lose both Mortensen and Lavaka along with BJ Taufalele (21 tkl). With 3 of the top 4 LB's gone this season, this is another defensive unit that may be in line for a step back in 2022.

DEFENSIVE BACKS - The Wildcats secondary allowed 225 ypg pass (60%) and a 24-17 ratio in 15 games in 2019. In the spring of 2021 they allowed 230 ypg but allowed just 50.6% completions to opposing QB's & an impressive 8-9 ratio in 6 games. Last fall the Wildcats secondary allowed just 173 pass ypg (#9 FCS) and impressive 11-10 ratio! The Weber St secondary was led by S Preston Smith (11 st, 61 tkl, 3 tfl, 4 pbu) and was 3rd Tm Big Sky. Smith is gone this season along with S Braxton Gunther (4 st, 32 tkl, 3.5 tfl, 3 pbu). The Wildcats return both starting CB's in Eddie Heckard (11 st, 48 tkl, 7 pbu) and Marque Collins (9 st, 18 tkl, 5 pbu) along with DB Kamden Garrett (5 st, 19 tkl, 3 pbu) and S Desmond Williams (4 st, 30 tkl, 3 pbu, 2 int). While this unit loses 2 starters, 6 of the top 9 tacklers return overall from this unit & they still should have solid secondary this season.

SPECIAL TEAMS - Kyle Thompson hit 4-7 fg's (L/51) in the spring of 2021 while Mackenzie Morgan averaged 41.3 yards per punt & had a solid net of 37.8 yards. Both K and P returned last fall and Thompson hit 12-15 fg's (L/48) while Morgan averaged 40.9 yards per punt & had a net of 38.1 yards. In the spring of '21 WR Shaheed led with 288 KR yards (28.8, 1 td) and the Wildcats only had 64 PR yards all season. Last fall Shaheed had an incredible season with 632 KR yards (28.7, 2 td) and 146 PR yards (9.7). This season Weber St loses their P and their top return man & the unit may not be as strong this season.

COACHES - Jay Hill enters his 9th season as the HC at Weber St & is 58-36 (44-17 Big Sky). After going 2-10 in his first season in 2014 Hill has guided the Wildcats to 7 straight winning seasons and they made the FCS Playoffs 5 straight times from 2016 to the spring 2021 season & made it to the FCS Semifinals in 2019. The new OC for Weber St is Mickey Mental, who spent 13 seasons at D-II Notre Dame College in Ohio & the L/5 seasons there he was the OC. Grant Duff enters his 8th season at Weber St overall and this is his 2nd season as the co-DC of the Wildcats. Prior to here Duff spent 5 years at Utah as an assistant coach where he worked with current HC Hill. The other Co-DC is Joe Dale, who is entering his 4th season at Weber St and now will take on the role of co-DC in addition to coaching safeties.

OFFENSE - In 2018 Weber St had the Big Sky's #7 scoring (27.8 ppg) but just the #13 total offense (321 ypg). In 2019 they were #8 in scoring with the same 27.8 ppg & again #13 in total offense (339 ypg). Last spring with just ten Big Sky teams playing the Wildcats finished #4 in scoring at just 27.5 ppg & were #2 in total offense (414 ypg). Last fall the offense returned all 11 starters but the Wildcats offense only put up 366 ypg, which was #7 in the Big Sky, however Weber St was #2 in scoring offense in the conference with 31.3 ppg. This fall the offense returns their top two QB's, 4 of the top 5 RB's, 6 of the top 8 receivers, and 3 starting OL. Overall with 8 starters back we think the offense has a good chance to improve the ypg this fall.

DEFENSE - In 2018, the Wildcats had the Big Sky's #1 scoring (21.2 ppg) and #1 total defense (319 ypg). In 2019 the Wildcats were again #1 in both scoring (20.8 ppg) & total defense (345 ypg). Last spring because of drastically different schedules as Montana, which only played 2 games including 1 vs a D-II team finished #1 in both categories. Weber played five Big Sky foes & one playoff game and they had the #2 scoring defense (20.3 ppg) & slipped to #3 in total defense (371 ypg). Last fall Weber St returned all 11 starters and their top 27 tacklers! All that experience back for Weber St led to the Wildcats allowing just 283 ypg (#1 Big Sky, #11 FCS) and 19.5 ppg (#4 Big Sky). Last fall Weber St also held foes 111 yards below their season average (#3 FCS!). This season Weber St loses 3 of their 4 starters on the DLine along with both starting LB's and both starting S's. With just 4 starters back on defense, this unit may still be solid but likely will take a step back from LY's productive defense.

2022 - LY's 6-5 record snapped Weber St's streak of 6 straight playoff appearances. HC Hill gets back 12 starters but just 4 from the steallar defense from a year ago. Weber St opens with Western Oregon (D-II) then travels to face Utah St. Weber St also faces Utah Tech at home in non-conference play. Weber St faces all 5 Big Sky teams that made the playoffs a season ago. They do face E.Wash, Montana, and Sac St at home, while they face Montana St & UC Davis on the road. The Wildcats also face Portalnd St and Northern Arizona on the road. Most of Weber St's toughest Big Sky games are at home this fall & they went just 1-4 at home LY (5-1 road). If the defense can come together & the offense stays healthy, the Wildcats should be in most of their Big Sky games this season but will have to likely pull a few upsets if they are to get back to the playoffs.