

INCARNATE WORD

POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

QUARTERBACKS - Going into the spring of '21 UIW had to replace their two year starting QB Jon Copeland (6325, 57.8%, 44-22 in '18-'19). True frosh Cameron Ward took over the starting role and topped 400 yards in 3 of the 6 games and in just 6 starts threw for 2260 yards (60%, 24-4) and was the FCS Freshman of the Year! Last season Ward was back and he picked up right where he left off in the spring season. Ward topped 300 pass yds in 11 of 13 games, and his best game of the season came against SE Louisiana when he threw for 610 yards and 7 td's! Ward also had a stellar game in the playoffs against Sam Houston as he passed for 481 yards and 5 td's in a tough OT loss. The bad news for UIW is that Ward (2nd Tm Southland) opted to transfer to Washington St. However, they bring in Lindsey Scott from Nicholls who was 3rd Tm Southland last fall. In the spring and fall seasons in 2021 Scott threw for a combined 3767 yds (60.4%) with a 34-18 ratio and ran for 1547 yards (6.6) and 15 td's. Scott faced UIW twice LY and threw for 294 yds (1-2) and ran for 139 yds. This unit is still in great shape entering the 2022 season.

RUNNING BACKS - RB Kevin Brown led in 2019 with 720 (5.6) and Ameer King was #2 with 505 (5.1). Both returned for the spring '21 season and K. Brown was even more impressive with 775 (10.5!) with Kaleb Ducros #2 with 127 (7.5). King had just 2 att's all year but all three RB's were back for the fall season in 2021. K. Brown led for the 3rd season in a row, this time rushing for 956 (6.4, 12 td) and was 1st Tm Southland. SE Louisiana transfer Marcus Cooper (996, 7.2, 6 td in 4Y at SLU) became the #2 RB and finished the fall '21 season with 580 yds (5.9, 8 td) and was 2nd Tm Southland. Tyrese Brown only saw limited carries & finished with 37 yds. K. Brown departs this season, but Cooper returns and if someone can step up alongside him to form a viable 1-2 punch, this unit will have another solid season

RECEIVERS - Going into the spring of '21 season UIW had to replace 3 of the top 4 WR's. Robert Ferrel led the way with 474 (13.5) with Tre Wolf #2 (464, 15.0) and Darion Chaffin #3 (372, 14.3). Jaelin Campbell was #4 (267, 14.1) and RB Brown was #5. The great news for the fall of '21 season is all the top WR's were back. However a new #1 WR would emerge, as Taylor Grimes caught 87 passes for 1145 yds (13.2, 15 td) and was 2nd Tm AA! Ferrel finished as the #2 WR (815, 11.0, 9 td) and was 2nd Tm Southland along with Chaffin, who ended LY with 771 yds (13.1, 11 td). Overall 5 WR's topped 300 yds and 3 of them return, and they are Grimes (12 st), Chaffin (12 st), and CJ Hardy (387, 13.8). Ferrel and Trevor Begue (10 st, 620, 13.5) are the top losses. UIW returns a good amount of their depth at WR and with two of their top three back this unit looks to be in great shape.

OFFENSIVE LINE - The offensive line paved the way for 175 rush ypg with a solid 6.5 ypc and allowed 17 sacks in 6 games. The unit returned nearly intact for the fall '21 season led by three 2nd team preseason Southland OL in Caleb Johnson, Nash Jones and Reid Francis. However, the rush numbers took a dive down to 127 ypg (4.6) and they allowed 33 sacks in 13 games, with 10 of those sacks coming in one game at McNeese. LT N. Jones was named 1st Tm Southland, while C Francis was named 2nd Tm Southland, and LG C. Johnson was also 2nd Tm Southland. Those three all return for the Cardinals along with RG Stanley Mark. The lone OL starter that is lost this season is 3rd Tm Southland RT Dawson Kier. With 4 OLine starters back for the Cardinals this season, we do expect an improvement in the rushing totals, and for the sacks to go down, especially with a mobile QB on the roster this season.

DEFENSIVE LINE - The Cardinals rush defense allowed 175 rush ypg (4.5) in 2019 and collected just 21 sacks (4.5%). In the 6 game season in the spring of '21 UIW allowed 162 rush ypg (3.2) and collected 12 sacks. However in the L/3 games of the spring season they gave up 268 rush ypg (6.9) and collected only 3 sacks. Last season in the fall UIW had their top 19 tacklers back, so this unit had a lot of experience back. The run defense had its moments (held 3 foes to under 100 yds) but also allowed over 200 yds in 4 games including their playoff loss to Sam Houston (346, 7.2). Overall they allowed 178 rush ypg (4.4) and collected just 23 sacks (4.8%). The DLine was led by Brandon Bowen (8 st, t-#10 tkl'r, 3.5 sk), along with Blaine Hoover (5 st, t-#13 tkl'r) and Cameron Preston (8 st, t-#13 tkl'r). UIW loses Bowen, Hoover and Lucas Terrell (7 st, 21 tkl, 2 sk). The Cardinals return Darius Richmond (3 st, 28 tkl), Preston, Seth Latham (5 st, 25 tkl, 4.5 tfl) and Jared Soyering (3 st, 22 tkl, 2 sk). With several players up front having start experience this unit should hopefully tighten up the run D and collect more sacks in 2022.

LINEBACKERS - UIW's defense allowed 463 ypg and 35 ppg in 2019 including giving up 195 pts in their L/5 games. For the season UIW allowed foes to gain 67 ypg above their season average. In the spring of '21 UIW gave up 373 yds & 360 yds in their F/2 games but in their final 4 games they gave up 616 ypg and 53 ppg including allowing 614 yards and 75 points at Nicholls! Overall they allowed 533 ypg and 42 ppg. Kelechi Anyalebechi (42 tkl) and Isaiah Paul (38 tkl, 4.5 tfl) were the top 2 tkl'rs in the spring & they both returned along with STAR Brandon Richard (#3 tkl'r, 3 pbu, 1 int). Anyalebechi led with 119 tackles (5.5 tfl, 5 pbu, 2 int) and was 3rd Tm All-American, while Paul was the #7 tfl'r (8 st, 42 tkl, 6.5 tfl) and Richard was the #4 tackler (12 st, 51 tkl, 2.5 tfl, 1 int). Overall the defense made an improvement, allowing 428 ypg and 27 ppg. Anyalebechi, Paul, and Richard all return along with Tylan George (2 st, 34 tkl). The top LB loss for UIW is Akil Jones (9 st, #8 tkl'r), but with 4 of the top 5 tacklers returning, this unit should help improve UIW's defense this season.

DEFENSIVE BACKS - The Cardinals have allowed at least 250 pass ypg for the past 6 seasons. In 2019 UIW gave up 288 pass ypg (67.5%) and grabbed 9 int's. In the spring season UIW gave up 318 pass ypg (63.6%) and collected just 4 int's. Last season the Cardinals pass defense allowed exactly 250 ypg passing (64.9%) and their interception total jumped to 16! The UIW secondary was led by 1st Tm Southland FS Kaleb Culp (13 st, 102 tkl's, 2 pbu) and 2nd Tm Southland SS Elliott Davidson (11 st, 55 tkl, 7 pbu, 4 int). CB Rashon Davis (13 st, 49 tkl, 13 pbu, 3 int) was also named 2nd Tm Southland. While Culp and Davidson both return, UIW loses CB's Davis and Moses Reynolds (9 st, 48 tkl, 7 pbu, 2 int). CB Dante Heaggans (3 st, 35 tkl, 6 pbu) returns and will likely start, but the other CB position is more of an unknown. But with 2 starters back & 3 players with start experience back, this unit will remain in pretty good shape.

SPECIAL TEAMS - UIW's K Carson Mohr hit 5-7 fg's in the spring of '21 with a long of 48 and one of his two misses was from 50+ yds! P Keven Nguyen had a solid 43.1 average with a net of 40.3 yds. Both players were back in the fall of '21, but Mohr split fg duties with John Scifers. Mohr hit 5-8 fg's with a long of 42 yards, while Scifers hit 2-4 fg's with a long of 49 yards & one of his misses was blocked. Nguyen averaged 43.3 yards per punt and again had a superb net of 42.2 yards and was named 1st Tm Southland. Robert Ferrel averaged 15.2 on PR's and Ce'Cori Tolds averaged 24.9 on KR's in the spring & both returned last fall. Tolds totaled 223 yds on KR's (24.8) while Ferrel had 157 punt return yards (11.2). PR Ferrel and backup K Scifers depart but the rest of the unit is back & should be one of the WAC's best.

COACHES - Former HC Eric Morris (24-18 in 4Y here) left for the OC job at Washington St, so UIW brings in a head coach as they make the move from the Southland to the WAC. Their new HC is former Tulsa QB GJ Kinne, who threw for 9,472 yards and 81 touchdowns

& was the 2010 CUSA POY! As a coach Kinne was an offensive analyst at Arkansas in '18, Offensive special projects coach for the Philadelphia Eagles in '19, the OC at Hawai'i in '20 and the co-OC and QB cch in '21 at UCF. Mack Leftwich is the offensive coordinator here & has been a coach here since 2018 where he was a grad assistant. In '19 he was elevated to be the QB coach and is now the OC and QB coach. The new DC is Jonathan Patke, who spent 2016-2021 as a member of the Miami Hurricanes staff, and was the OLB's coach in '21 and spent the L3Y there as the ST coordinator as well. Matthew Gregg is the ST coordinator for UIW.

FORECAST

OFFENSE - Incarnate Word's offense only put up 295 ypg and 21 ppg in the 2017 season. In 2018 Eric Morris was brought in as the new HC and switched to a passing offense and improvements were seen right away. In '18 UIW put up 483 ypg and 34 ppg and won a share of the Southland title! In '19 the numbers dipped a bit to 417 ypg and 30 ppg. With frosh QB Ward taking over in the spring of '21 the Cardinals offense soared to 552 ypg and 42 ppg in a 6 game season. Last fall with Ward back the numbers were still strong as they put up 487 ypg and 39 ppg. This season they do lose Ward, but bring in a very talented QB from Nicholls. In addition to that the Cardinals have 6 starters back including 4 on the OLine, so this unit shouldn't see much of a drop off.

DEFENSE - Starting with the 2016 season, UIW has allowed at least 400 ypg in 6 straight seasons. In '17 UIW posted their worst mark to date, as they allowed 495 ypg and 48 ppg. Those numbers improved slightly to 479 ypg and 34 ppg in 2018 and again in 2019 to 463 ypg, but they did allow 35 ppg. Then in the 6 game 2021 spring season UIW posted their worst defensive marks since moving up to the FCS, allowing 533 ypg, and they also gave up 42 ppg. With their top 19 tacklers back for the fall last season the numbers did drop to 428 ypg and 27 ppg allowed. UIW does get 6 starters back, but do have a new DC in town & will have to learn a new system but they have a shot have a similar defense to the one we saw last season.

2022 - Incarnate Word made a transition up to Division I football finally become a full fledged member of the Southland Conference in 2014 in football. UIW didn't have their first winning season until 2018 when they went 6-5 and won a share of the Southland and were +75 ypg in conference play. They started of 2019 5-2 before losing their last 5 games as their defense allowed 67 ypg above what their foes averaged. They went 3-3 in the spring season last year and in the fall of '21 won their first-ever outright Southland championship and won their first-ever FCS playoff game, defeating SF Austin 35-28 in OT. Last fall UIW put 93 ypg more than their foes averaged, which was #6 in the FCS. This season they were set to move to the WAC, but made the decision in mid July to remain in the Southland. The offense should still put up productive numbers with QB Scott taking over and 2 of the top 3 WR's back. The big question, as has usually been the case, is the defense. They get their top 4 tacklers back & 8 of their top 12 back. UIW opens at home vs S. Illinois, but then play 3 straight road games including the Southland opener at SE Louisiana. UIW gets McNeese and Lamar at home & then QB Scott faces his former team (Nicholls) on the road. UIW should challenge for the Southland title. If the Cardinals remain healthy & their defense takes a leap, they should be in the mix to win the Southland in 2022.