

# TEXAS A&M-COMMERCE

## POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

**QUARTERBACKS** - Texas A&M CC lost their starting QB going into 2019, but Miklo Smalls would take over the job and he threw for 3,010 yards (65%, 23-8) and ran for 488 yards (3.9). Smalls was set to return last fall but was injured in the spring and missed the first six games of 2021. Former Louisiana QB Jaiave Magalei began last fall as the starter and finished the season with 696 pass yards in 6 starts (58%, 9-4). Smalls started 5 games (missed season finale) and was the leading passer with 837 yards (60%, 5-6). This season Magalei returns along with Eric Rodriguez (258, 50%, 1-1 LY). They also have former Ohio St/Texas A&M QB Jagger Laroe (PS#143) on the roster and Texas A&M-Kingsville QB Zadock Dinkelman is added as well. We expect Magalei and Rodriguez to battle for the starting job & despite losing their top guy this unit remains in decent shape entering '22.

**RUNNING BACKS** - Antonio Leali'ie'e led the Lions with 689 rush yards (6.6, 7 td) in 2019 and backup Jemal Williams was the #3 rusher with 465 (5.7). In 2021 both Leali'ie'e and Williams returned and while Leali'ie'e led the team in rushing again, it was just with 421 yards (5.6) and the #2 rusher was Carandal Hale with 396 yards (5.0) while JT Smith was #3 (336, 7.5). This season Leali'ie'e departs along with Hale and EJ Thompson (210, 3.8) and only one of the top four RB's returns in 2022 and that is JT Smith. Koby Leavatts (152, 7.2) also returns, but beyond Smith and Leavatts the depth is a ? going into the season.

**RECEIVERS** - In 2019 Chance Cooper led the Lions with 696 yards. Last fall Cooper returned but the #2 and #3 receivers were gone and Matt Childers (228, 17.5) was back. Childers went on to lead A&M-CC with just 382 yards (12.7) while Cooper was right behind him with 374 yards (12.9). This season the Lions lose their #1 and #2 receivers from last season, but they return their #3, #4, #5, and #6 receivers led by Andrew Armstrong (297, 19.8) and Kevin Ledee (136, 13.6). While they lose their top 2 from LY, the passing numbers were underwhelming and they return solid depth. They also add former San Diego St WR BJ Busbee and SMU WR Treveon Johnson. Overall this unit might take a small step forward if the pass game shows improvement.

**OFFENSIVE LINE** - In 2019 A&MCC's OLine paved the way for 169 rush ypg (4.9) but they did allow 26 sacks. Last fall the Lions OLine helped pave the way for 160 rush ypg (4.4) and they allowed 21 sacks. This season the OLine takes a significant hit as 4 starters depart, leaving RG Solomon Ndukwe as the lone starter back. This unit adds a Maryland transfer, and have a pair of JUCO OL that are in year two, so they could step up & become starters. However, this unit could struggle to open holes in the run game as they have to find four new starters & are moving up a level in competition.

**DEFENSIVE LINE** - In 2019 A&M-CC allowed 123 rush ypg (3.2) and they collected 44 sacks. DE Elijah Earls collected 9.5 sacks in 2019 and DE Jaylon Hodge collected 7.5 sacks and they both were back in 2021. Last season the Lions run defense was stout as they gave up just 103 ypg (2.8) and recorded 37 sacks for the year. DE Earls led the DLine in tackles (11 st, 43 tkl, 6 sk) and DE Hodge recorded 5 sacks last fall. This season Earls and Hodge both are gone & they also lose NT Devin Beamon (11 st, 1.5 tfl). Also gone for '22 is Anthony Hayes who did not start a game but picked up 5.5 sacks. This unit has just 1 starter back in DT Ben Hutch (9 st, 35 tkl, 6 tfl) and Justice Williams (21 tkl, 4.5 sk) is also back, but with quite a bit of production leaving from the DLine this unit will be taking a step back in '22.

**LINEBACKERS** - Terrell Collins led A&M-CC in tackles in 2019 with 95 (8 tfl, 4.5 sk). Heading into 2021 The Lions lost Collins along with the #2 LB from 2019 (57 tkl, 8.5 tfl). Cedrick Wilcox started 8 games & led all LB's with 50 tackles (4 tfl) while Xavier Morris finished the season with 37 tackles (5 st, 3 tfl, 1 int). This season A&M-CC loses Wilcox, but they return Morris, Michael Noble (4 st, 34 tkl) and former Arkansas transfer Dee Walker (5 st, 34 tkl, 2.5 tfl). With just 1 starter gone and 3 LB's returning with starting experience, and they also add a Kentucky transfer in Tyler Malin. This unit is in fairly good shape overall entering 2022.

**DEFENSIVE BACKS** - The Lions pass defense gave up 194 ypg in 2019 (51%) and collected 11 int's. Last fall the Lions pass defense allowed just 128 pass ypg and held opposing QB's to just 49% completions. The A&M-CC secondary was led by DB Dominique Ramsey (11 st, 51 tkl, 2 int) along with S Alex Shillow (11 st, 49 tkl, 5 pbu, 1 int) and S Darius Williams (F/5 st, 5 tfl, 1 int). This season the Lions lose both Shillow and Ramsey along with CB's Kader Kohou (11 st, 24 tkl, 2 tfl, 6 pbu) and D'Angelo Ellis (9 st, 19 tkl, 2 int). Safeties D. Williams and Daryion Taylor (L/6 st, 45 tkl, 4 tfl, 1 int) are the only 2 DB's returning with start exp from last fall and this unit will surely take a step back with several exp'd players gone for the '22 season.

**SPECIAL TEAMS** - Jake Viquez hit 15-21 fg's in 2019 (L/48, 2 blk'd) while Andrew Gomez was the main P in '19 and averaged 40.3 yds per punt (tm net of 35.1). Last fall Viquez was back & hit 17-27 fg's (L/52), but the Lions had a new punter in Mitchell McGarry who averaged 37.8 yds per punt. Emmanuel Adagbon also punted 12 times and averaged just 29.2 yds per punt! The team net was just 31.4 yards. DB Dominique Ramsey led with 550 KR yds and 264 PR yds (2 return td's) in 2019. Last fall Ramsey again was the main return man & racked up 280 KR yards (23.3) and 453 PR yards (15.6, 1 td). The bad news is this unit loses K Viquez and superstar return man Ramsey. They do have a Miss St transfer at kicker, but this unit likely will take a step back in 2022.

**COACHES** - David Bailff enters his 3rd season as the HC at A&M-CC. He went 11-3 in his first season in 2019, then after not playing in 2020 the Lions went 7-4 last fall in Bailff's second season. Bailff previously spent 11 seasons as the HC at Rice from 2007-2017 (57-80) and also was the HC at Texas State when they were an FCS school from 2004-2006 (21-15). Billy Riebock enters year three as the OC here. Prior to A&M-CC he was the OC/QB cch at Bridgewater College in '18 and

was an Offensive QC coach at Rice in '17. DC Kyle Williams is also in year three here. Williams was the DB coach at UT Permian Basin in 2018 and from 2014-17 was the DC at Sul Ross State. Jack Welch is the ST coordinator for A&M-CC & is in year three here. Prior to joining the Lions staff in 2019 Welch was the Athletic Director & HC at Copperas Cove HS from 1994-2017.

## FORECAST

**OFFENSE** - In 2019 (Bailff's first season) the Lions offense gained 410 ypg and 33 ppg. After a year off A&M-CC's offense came back last fall and only gained 327 ypg but scored 30 ppg. This season the Lions offense brings back just 3 starters and while the ypg might take a bit of hit, the ppg will surely drop off some this season

**DEFENSE** - The Lions defense gave up 316 ypg and 20 ppg in 2019. Last season the Lions defense was superb as they allowed just 230 ypg which was #3 in D-II in 2021! However, we expect a drop off this season as the Lions lose 8 starters from their defense last season.

**2022** - Texas A&M-CC makes the move up to the FCS level this season. After their home opener against D-II Lincoln (CA) they face FCS foes Tenn Tech and Sam Houston on the road. The Lions then face D-II North American at home but then go on the road again for two more FCS games against SE Louisiana and McNeese. Their first home game vs an FBS foe comes against Houston Baptist and then are at home the next 2 weeks against Incarnate Word and NW State. The Lions close with a road game at Nicholls and host Tennessee St. This season's schedule for the Lions is a tough one for their first season as an FCS member. With just 6 starters back the Lions may struggle in year one in the Southland Conference, but will likely have many players develop experience and should be in much better shape to compete in 2023.