

# WESTERN CAROLINA CATAMOUNTS

## POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

**QUARTERBACKS** - WCU played 3 games in the fall of '20 then another 6 in the spring. Will Jones started the 3 fall games and threw for 256 (50%, 2-2). In the spring Ryan Glover took over at QB and threw for 832 (59%, 3-4) and rushed for 93 (1.8). Glover transferred to Cal but they brought in Rogan Wells who led HC Bell's Valdosta St to a national title in 2018 and was 28-3 as a starting QB with them. He was twice a finalist for the Harlon Hill trophy. Wells threw for 300 or more yards in 6 of his 9 starts and finished with 2,596 (58%, 20-13) and was their #2 rusher with 552 (6.1). He was injured vs Chattanooga and missed 2 games with Carlos Davis taking the helm and he started vs The Citadel when WCU ended their 8 game losing streak. He threw for 401 in that game and was the SoCon Offensive POW. Davis added 902 (65%, 6-5) and rushed for 85 (3.0). This year they lose 2nd Tm All-SoCon QB Wells but at least Davis gained valuable experience. They add Tenn Tech transfer Braden Carnes who originally was at Louisville as a W/O. Davis showed what he is capable of last year and they could be better than expected.

**RUNNING BACKS** - RB Donovan Spencer was the top RB in 2019 with 530 yds (4.0) and in the fall/spring season he led with 718 (5.5) including 220 yds in the lone win vs the Citadel. Spencer moved on with the top returnee being Mikai Stanley (222, 4.9). They did add Valdosta St grad transfer Kenny Benjamin and Tusculum transfer TJ Jones. Benjamin and Jones split action with Jones leading the charge. He rushed for 589 (4.7, 306 rec) and topped 100 twice with 115 vs ECU and 132 vs The Citadel. Benjamin was #3 with 355 (3.5) and did even more in the passing game, finishing with 503 (9.7). No other RB topped 100 yards. Benjamin (7 st) moves on but they added his younger brother, Brandon from Missouri St. Jones is their only experienced back so depth is their biggest concern.

**RECEIVERS** - In 2019 the top 4 receivers had 433, 302, 254 and 233 yards. None of the 4 was a regular in the fall or spring as Frosh Calvin Jones led with 185 (8.4), TE Clayton Bardall was #2 with 156 (15.6) and TE Raekwon Heath was #3 with 152 (12.7). All 3 were back last year and they added USF Transfer Terrance Horne (PS#373, 9 rec), Tusculum transfer Raphael Williams (13-194) and East Carolina transfer Mydreon Vines (19 rec 3Y). This unit was vastly more experienced with added talent. Raphael Williams had 5 100-yard games including 177 vs Wofford. He led with 959 (13.1) and was named 1st Tm All SoCon by the Coaches and Frosh POY. Calvin Jones was #2 with 651 and a team best 17.1 ypc. Horn had 213 (15.2). This year they only lose Jakobe Quillen (3 st, 258, 16.1), TE Owen Cosenke (6 st, 106, 8.2) and Daquan Patten (1 st, 155, 12.9). With their top 2 back this is now one of the top WR units in the SoCon.

**OFFENSIVE LINE** - Last year WCU returned 3 starters from a unit that paved the way for 135 (4.1) with 7.8% sacks in their fall/spring season. The addition of a mobile QB helped them bump to 151 rush ypg (4.4) with 21 sacks (4.2%). They did lose starting LT Garrett Bowman after 4 games RT Dillon Luther after 3 games. Both depart but their replaces performed well and the only starter they lose is RT Michael Harper (8 st). They added UMass transfer Dalton Tomlinson (21 car st). With 4 starters back and better health this could be a much improved unit.

**DEFENSIVE LINE** - In 2018 WCU allowed 229 (5.2) rush in SoCon play. Things got worse in '19 when they allowed 265 (6.0) vs SoCon foes. They allowed 234 rush ypg in 3 fall games in '20 then gave up 300 (5.1) in 5 spring games vs conference foes. They brought in Gardner Webb transfers 320 lb Marlon Alexander and 355 lb Ronald Wilson b. Their #7, #9 and #11 tacklers returned. The added size and experience didn't have the desired affect as they allowed 269 (5.6) vs SoCon foes including 327 (6.6) in their last 4 games. Five of their top 6 return including their #8, #10, #13, #17 and #20 tacklers. They add 345 lb JUCO transfer Desmond Barkley who was at Troy for 2 years prior. This unit has greatly improved their size and we think it's ready to turn the corner to being respectable but still near the bottom of the SoCon.

**LINEBACKERS** - The teams top two tacklers in their fall/spring season were their solid LB duo of Ty Harris (#1 tklr, 4 sk, 4 tfl) and Trevor Childers (#2 tklr, 2 tfl, 1 int). Last year both returned but Childers was passed on the depth chart by Kareem Taylor 11 st, (#1 tkl'r, 6 tfl, 3rd Tm All-SoCon) and Ivan Hogans 9 st, #3 tkl'r, 3 sk, 8 tfl, 2 int). Both Taylor and Hogans depart this year along with Ty Harris (8 st, #4 tkl'r, 5.5 tfl, 2 pbu) and Childers (1 st, #9 tkl'r, 2.5 tfl). All 4 of their contributing LB's are gone and they have no significant FBS or FCS transfers so this unit is a huge concern.

**DEFENSIVE BACKS** - Last year WCU's #4 and #7 tacklers were back in their secondary so we said this unit would improve playing behind a bigger front 7. The Catamounts allowed 198 pass ypg which was 3rd best in the conference and were also 3rd in pass defense efficiency (56.3%, 17-11). This year WCU loses 3rd Tm All-SoCon CB Ronald Kent (11 st, #7 tkl'r, 7 pd), Quintin Talley (1 st, #15 tkl'r), Charles Gadie (2 st, #16 tkl'r), Nick Oelrich (#18 tkl'r) and LA Rogers -Anderson (1 st, #19 tkl'r). Their #2, #5, #6 and #12 tacklers return but most of their depth has been deplete. Lehigh transfer Jaylen Floyd started 16 games prior to coming here last year but was OFY after the 4th game. He returns and they add Taurus Dotson who started 29 games at Valdosta St. With 3 starters they are improved and their depth is replaceable.

**SPECIAL TEAMS** - In Spring Richard McCollum hit 3-6 FG (long 45) and Paxton Robertson hit 2-2 with a long of 52 and both att's 40+. Robertson had 34 punts (39.5) and Brandon Dickerson had 20 (38.5) with the team net of 35.8. All 3 returned and the only loss was their KR. McCollum was perfect on all 12 fg attempts (L/40) while Robertson went 0-2. Dickerson had 46 punts for a 38.3 average and their net dropped to 34.7. Daeuan Patten averaged 10.9 PR and Calvin Jones had a 31.1 KR average. Once again they only lose their PR, making this one of the top ST unit in the SoCon.

**COACHES** - Former Florida Gators all-time great QB Kerwin Bell took over as HC last year. He led DII Valdosta St to a National Title and a school record 15 straight wins. He was HC at FCS Jacksonville for 9 years prior. He was the SEC POY in 1984 and was a Grad asst under Steve Spurrier. His son Cade is the OC. Cade was a 4Y starting QB under his dad at Jacksonville and was an asst at Valdost St. DC Chazmon Scales is in his 2nd year. He was DC at Central Arkansas for 2 years. 1st year ST Coor Chris Norris was a Special Teams analyst at Oregon the last 5 years.

## FORECAST

**OFFENSE** - WCU averaged 467 ypg and 32 ppg in '18 but dropped to just 18 ppg and 330 ypg in '19. They struggled in both their 3 fall and 5 spring games as they averaged just 16 ppg and 275 ypg. Last year they brought in HC Kerwin Bell who was known as an offensive mind. Bell sparked the Catamounts offense and they averaged 32 ppg and 471 ypg. They really hit their stride in their last 5 games where they put up 45, 41, 43, 35 & 52 points while averaging 547 ypg in that span. This year they lose QB Wells but Carlos Davis threw for 401 vs The Citadel last year and he has their top 2 WR's, their top rusher and 4 starters on the Oline all returning. This is their 2nd year under Bell's system and based on how they played down the stretch they should be extremely explosive.

**DEFENSE** - In '19 WCU allowed 420 ypg and 36 ppg. They were gashed for 40 ppg and 510 ypg in their '20-'21 season but were a little better vs SoCon foes, allowing 34 ppg and 471 ypg. Last year 9 starters returned on D and they added some beef up front. The size didn't help as their run D struggled but their pass D was a pleasant surprise. They allowed 41 ppg and 456 ypg but again were slightly better vs SoCon, giving up 37 ppg and 436 ypg. Only 10 of their top 20 tacklers return. They do have 7 starters back including all 4 on the Dline. It's hard to imagine they won't improve but the offense's quick strike capability will put them on the field more.

**2022** - Western Carolina has not made the play-offs since 1983. In '16 WCU was off back-to-back winning seasons but their defense struggled and they finished just 2-9 and were -136 ypg (-155 vs SoCon). In '17 they rebounded, starting 4-1 before a close loss at Wofford, won 3 of their next 4 to get to 7-3 but lost their last 2 vs Mercer by 2 (507-344 yd) and at North Carolina 65-10. They finished 7-5 but were +54 ypg and +48 vs SoCon. In '18 they started 3-0 then lost their last 8 games with only 2 of those losses coming by single digits and they were -23 ypg (-38 vs SoCon). In '19 they started 2-1 then lost 5 straight. After a 2 game winning streak they lost to Samford by 18 and Bama by 63 to finish 4-8 but were 3-5 vs SoCon foes. They were -89 ypg and 4-9 ypg vs SoCon. They lost all 3 of their fall games in '20 then went 1-4 in the spring and were -235 ypg. With 3 straight losing seasons they let Mark Speir go and hired Kerwin Bell. Last year they started 0-6 but the offense was productive. The Catamounts won 4 of their last 5 games, finishing 4-4 in SoCon play and were +46 ypg vs conference foes. They were -11 TO's last year. 15 starters return this year. Their only loss in their last 5 last year was to SoCon Champs ETSU and they led that 35-28 2Q but were SOD at the ET2 and int'd at the ET3 in the 2H. Their toughest home game is the finale vs UTC and the other 4 are very winnable. Based on the end of last season WCU is now a contender for a conference Title.