

# CAMPBELL 2021 PREVIEW

HC Mike Minter was a starter in the NFL for 10 yrs with the Carolina Panthers. After serving as an assistant HC at D-II Johnson C. Smith for one season and as ST coordinator at Liberty for one season, Minter took the lead gig at Campbell. After going 3-9 in his inaugural season in '13, Minter has helped stabilize a program that only reinstituted football in '08. Minter won five or more games every season from '14-'19, including posting three-straight winning seasons from '17-'19 before operating as an independent in '20. Campbell has returned to the Big South in '21 after initially joining the conference in '18. Prior to '18, since their reinstitution, Campbell football had been non-scholarship and was competing in the Pioneer Football League. Campbell's best finish since joining the Big South was their fourth-place effort from '19.

Campbell played all four games in '20 in the fall and on the road and against FBS opponents, going 0-4. Campbell managed at least 21 points in three of their four games and lost at Georgia St to open the season by the narrowest of margins, 27-26.

Jr. Hajj-Malik Williams is a multi-year starter for Campbell who turned in an impressive '19 campaign before having to play superior competition week in and week out in '20. Prior to the '20 season, Williams was named Big South OPOY after posting over 2,000 yds passing and an efficient 17/9 TD/INT ratio in '19. Campbell was able to average a respectable 345 ypg in '20 while putting up over 200 ypg through the air. Campbell averaged 21 points on the season and proved they can hang with the big boys. Campbell was able to gain over 200 yds on the ground vs Coastal Carolina as well. Williams also led Campbell in rushing in '20 (216/4.1). Campbell returns 10 starters on offense including their top two RBs from '20, as well as Jr. standout and leading WR Jalen Kelsey (758/15.8 since '19). Sr. TE Julian Hill was named a preseason honorable mention by the Big South after averaging 17.0 ypc in '20. The experience the OL gained while playing bigger and stronger teams last season will be invaluable once they are able to step back into the Big South. Look for Campbell's OL to push teams around in-conference.

The defense struggled in '20, but it was to be expected given their level of competition. Campbell was still able to churn out the seventh highest game grades in all of FCS given how well they played up to their competition. For being a team that has been a perennial six-win ballclub, the experience in '20, although it produced an ugly record, ought to be dividends in the years ahead for Campbell. Not just the OL, but the defense in general gained as much as any part of the team. While the defense got beat up at times, they will return 10 starters that include Preseason All-Big South 1st team honoree and Sr. Darion Slade. Slade led the team in tackles in '20 and will be a key figure in what should be a much-improved defense in '21.

Sr. RS Malik Grate averaged 15.5 yds per kickoff return as he tried to wiggle through faster and stronger opponents. Jr. P McKay Taylor had an excellent season as he averaged 43.7 yds per boot with three kicks of 50+ yds. So. Isaac Riffle will have to improve as a KOS after putting two of his kicks OB in just four games. Former PK Robert Brown is the only hole needing filled. Brown was just 1/2 on FGAs but did have a long of 45.

If not for North Carolina A&T being picked to finish third, Campbell should be considered the sleeper in this year's conference race after being picked to finish fifth. Charleston Southern HC Autry Denson is still relatively new at his post and there ought to be concerns about their team from an offensive standpoint. Meanwhile, Campbell HC Mike Minter has sustained a certain level of success at an essentially brand-new program and is clearly looking to advance his team to the next level. Despite an 0-4 season on paper, Campbell's ability to play four FBS teams last year while hanging tough is something that cannot be quantified until Campbell takes the field in '21. However, it can't be overstated how crucial those four games will end up being to the success of Campbell's rise in the Big South, especially with 20 starters on offense and defense returning. While they may not win the Big South in '21, don't be shocked if Campbell turns a few heads this season.