

# GARDNER-WEBB 2021 PREVIEW

HC Tre Lamb, who was a decorated QB at Tennessee Tech ('08-'12), is entering his second season with Gardner-Webb. Lamb enjoyed a terrific start to his tenure, as his very first game as a HC at any level was an impressive 42-20 upset win over #24 Elon. GW has not experienced at least a .500 season since '13, and while only finishing the truncated spring season at 2-2, the '20-'21 season was a major building block for a program looking to establish credibility under the guise of a rookie HC.

HC Tre Lamb guided GW to back-to-back wins to start his HC career before a big loss at home against a very, very talented Monmouth (48-19). GW closed their shortened '20-'21 campaign with Lamb's first road game by going down in defeat at the hands of an up-and-coming Charleston Southern by a score of 20-7.

GW featured a productive ground attack which catapulted them to their first two victories (211.5/5.4). However, GW was not even half as effective running the ball in their two losses at the end of the season (92/2.6). Perhaps teams were able to keen in on the running game for GW because of their uneven play at QB. Former QB Carlton Aiken posted a 61.0% completion percentage but had an undesirable 3/7 TD/INT ratio. GW will have to replace their QB this fall and have two QBs with in-game experience, but both have had very limited snaps. HC Tre Lamb can choose to potentially win now with former Wake Forest transfer and Gr. Tayvon Bowers (PS#91), or he could try to build around So. Jy Tolen. GW returns their top two RBs from last spring, including projected starter and Jr. Narii Gaither (349/5.7). GW have lost their top two WRs from spring but added transfers from Stetson, Wofford, and UCONN to immediately bolster the help for whoever is lined up underneath center come fall. The OL has five starters returning and should work to return to their form from earlier this past spring.

The defense for GW in '20-'21 was very respectable. They held opponents to 124 ypg rushing (3.3). They also held opponents to under 200 yds passing in two of a possible four games. Perhaps GW's most impressive trait on either side of the ball was their ability to get after the QB. GW recorded at least four sacks in three of their four games and posted a sack percentage of 10.1%. The defense returns with nine starters and eight more players with starting experience. The defense is deep and jam-packed with experience. As HC Tre Lamb continues to implement his offense, it will be a relief for him to know he can safely rely on his defense to be at the very least competitive. The defense returns it's top eight tacklers, highlighted by their leading tackler from last spring and Preseason All-Big South honoree Ty French. French, a So., led GW in tackles, TFL, and sacks (35/8.0/4.0). French was a big reason why GW was able to successfully put pressure on the QB with consistency and should continue to adopt their aggressive play upfront as an identity for this defense.

GW will have to find a new PK and KOS, but after going 3/6 on FGAs with two kickoffs going OB in the spring, that shouldn't be too entirely difficult. Gr. P Jack Pawlowski was efficient at pinning opponents deep, placing five of his 15 punts I20. With that said, RS Devron Harper will be sorely missed, and not just in the WR room, but even more for his ability to break a big play on ST. Harper averaged 28.8 yds per kick return last spring while averaging 18.2 yds per punt return. Harper took two punts all the way for TDs, including a 93-yd punt return to the house. Harper entered the transfer portal following spring ball and GW will have to work diligently to replace his production.

It cannot be understated the unexpected loss of a gamebreaker like Devron Harper can have on a team still finding it's footing under a HC who has only been at the helm for four games. While the defense and the team's ability to flip the field with effective punting will keep them competitive, and the fact GW has shown flashes of an effective run game with a talented RB still in the fold means they ought to be able to move the ball, looming QB questions and the lack of a true playmaker like Harper ultimately lower the ceiling for this team. GW hosts Charleston Southern in their final home game in a battle that could determine who finishes in the middle of the pack and who will finish in the bottom half of the Big South. A middle-of-the-pack finish would lay a great foundation for GW and it's young HC.