

RHODE ISLAND RAMS 2021 PREVIEW

While the Rams doubled their 2015 win total in 2016, that only meant going from 1 win to 2. In fact, they had not had a winning season since going 8-3 in 2001. In 2017 they won 2 of their final 4 games to finish 3-8 their best record since going 3-8 in 2011! Hopes were high for Rhode Island in 2019 and the season could not have started much better. They held on to win their opener over #15 Delaware, then the Blue Hen's 4Q 2 pt conversion failed. They led Albany 31-7 at HT and 45-7 into the 4Q before allowing 19 meaningless pts. They were ranked for the first time since 2005 (started 3-0). While they never led FBS foe Connecticut, they tied the game at 42 & 49 before allowing a GW td with :57 left. They only trailed once (3-2) vs Harvard & led 23-6 in 3Q before allowing final 10 pts. They shut out Brown 48-0 (27-0 HT). at 4-1, they were not just thinking winning season but possibly a playoff berth. They were ranked #16, when they hosted #20 Maine. They led most of the game but the lead changed 3 times in the final 2:28 including when Maine hit a final play GW 54 yd FG, as URI lost 38-36. They were still #22 when they trailed #18 Stony Brook 24-0 2Q & lost 52-14. After trailing William & Mary 7-0, the Rams took a 14-7 HT lead and won 21-10. Against #8 Elon they got withing 24-21 with 1:12 left but could not recover the onside kick. They trailed #9 James Madison 27-14 at HT but got withing 10, three times in 2H but lost by 17. At 5-5 they hosted New Hampshire (a team they had not beat since 2010), with a winning season on the line. They led 17-0 3Q but just 17-14 early 4Q but held on for a 24-21 win. While they playoff dream ended, their **first winning season in 17 years, was a huge achievement.** In 2019 they had 6 starters back on offense and 7 on defense. My Stock Market Indicator had them at a -3.5 which was a factor pointing down and it proved to be spot on as the Rams opened up 0-4 with a 3 point loss to NH and a 4 point loss to Stony Brook. After beating Brown by 3 it was a loss to Vtech, Albany and Elon to fall to 1-7 and clinch a losing season. After a win vs Merrimack they lost their last 3 and were 0-8 in Colonial play and -59 ypg. HC Jim Fleming, OC Will Fleming & DC Pete Rekstis all return for their 8th season at Rhode Island. They had 13 returning starters to work with, and opened with a 40-37 upset win at Villanova and followed that up with a 17-10 win at Albany. They lost at home to Delaware 35-21 to finish 2-1 for a rare winning season but were -111 ypg in CAA play.

The offense returned 6 starters in 2019 to the CAA's #3 Scoring (30.3 ppg) and #7 Total offense (352 ypg). They lost 2nd tm CAA QB JaJuan Lawson (7 st), who threw for 1,711 (66.7%, 17-5) & was the #3 rusher (172, 2.3, 5 td), despite missing 4 games. They returned QB Vito Priore (781, 54.6%, 7-4), who started the 4 games Lawson missed. Priore threw for 3268 yards (59.6%, 22-12) in the Rams 2-10 year. Last year Priore moved

on. Last Spring Maryland transfer Kaim Hill (PS#X) started all three games and hit 36-of-63 (57.1 %) for 389 yards and also ran for 49 yards and a pair of touchdowns. He split time with Liberty transfer Brandon Robinson who was second on the team with 63 rushing yards. Against nationally-ranked Delaware, he rushed for 43 yards and two touchdowns on nine carries while also completing 3-of-6 passes for 85 yards. Both QB's return giving the Rams a formidable duo at QB. In '19 the Rams returned 8 of their top 9 rushers including their top 2 in RB Zoe Bryant (6 st, 456, 4.0, 101 rec) and RB Naim Jones (4 st, 435, 4.4). Bryant led with 493 (4.3) despite missing the last 4 games with injury. Naim Jones stepped in and had 444 of his 493 (4.7) yards in the final 5 games. Matt Pires was #3 with 117 (7.8). They had to replace Jones and while Bryant was back he had just 5-28 in the opener missing the last 2 games. Kevin Brown Jr burst on the scene and led with 256 (5.2) in just 3 games and was CAA rookie of the year the first Rhode Island player to win a major year-end league award since Joe Casey was Atlantic 10 Rookie of the year in 2005. Brown is back and the add Purdue transfer Tirek Murphy. In 2019 they lost 3 of their top 6 receivers who combined for 660 yds including WR Marven Beauvais (2 st, 336, 10.8, 7 td) & 2nd tm CAA TE Tyler Burke (11 st, 238, 15.9, 3 td). Their top 2 receivers returned in 1st tm CAA WR Aaron Parker (955, 15.7, 10 td) & WR Isaiah Coulter (604, 14.4, 3 td). Even in a 2-10 season the duo each managed to top 1,000 yards with Parker leading with 1224 (15.1) and Colter #2 with 1039 (14.4). Ahmere Dorsey was #3 with 605 (14.1). Unfortunately the top 3 moved on after 2019 and the leading returnee was Ivory Frimpong (122 (8.7). Frimpong earned 2nd team CAA in the spring with 186 (13.3) in just 3 games. He is back and is joined by transfers Jeremiah Falls (Western Kentucky), Jelani Foster (Buffalo) and Paul Woods (Rutgers). They are more experienced at this position. Ed Lee who was #2 in the spring (144 yds) will miss the season. In 2019 the OLine lost 3 OL, who started 8+ including Ball St transfer RT Kadin Booker (10 st) & C Dwayne Scott, a 3 year starter, who went through spring before deciding to grad transfer to Boston College, to pursue his NFL dream. They returned 4 OL who combined for 26 starts led by two 11 gm starters in 1st tm CAA LT Kyle Murphy & RG Kevin Lawrence. After the O-line paved the way for 127 (3.6) rush in 2018 with 11.8% sacks they slipped to 92 ypg rush (3.4) but did cut the sacks to 5.2%. In the spring they lost both Murphy (NY Giants) and Lawrence. They returned Nick Correia and Evan Lovell a pair of 12 games starters. Soph Sebastian Delasoudas is the C and a team captain. They did improve to 148 ypg (4.1) but allowed 13.3% sacks. The top 11 OL are back from the spring but this is not an overwhelming unit. The offense had a great 382 ypg in CAA play in 2019 and 319 in the spring. They have potential with the troika of QB Hill, RB Brown and WR Frimpong and a veteran Oline.

The 2019 defense returned 7 starters from the CAA's #9 scoring (28.2 ppg) & #6 Total defense (345 ypg) in '18 . The DLine lost 2 of their top 7 DL who combined for 5 sts, 31 tkl, 1 sk & 4.5 tfl. They returned their top 5, who combined for 39 sts, 189 tkl, 19 sk & 12 tfl giving them a solid front. They were led by DE's LB Mack (10 st, 52 tkl, 6 sk, 5 tfl) & Andre Bibeault (6 st, 40 tkl, 4.5 sk, 2 tfl) but slipped to allowing 244 ypg rush (6.3) with just 16 sacks on the year. Last year they had to replace 2 DL and Mack moved to LB as switched to a 3 man front. They allowed 361 (6.2) rush with just 5 sacks. All 3 starters from the spring return including Bibeault and they add in Rutgers transfer Matt Thomas and a pair of Division III transfers. In '19 they lost two of three 11 gm LB starters in Justin Hogan (52 tkl, 2.5 tfl) & Nas Jones (3 sk, 4.5), who led with 78 tkl. They returned Brayan Javier-Castillo (78 tkl, 6.5 tfl, 2 int) but their next 2 returning LB's combined for just 19 tkl. In the spring they had to replace Castillo so were rather young. Andre Blackett led the team with 20 tkls in the spring and Evan Stewart a Boston College transfer had 15 tkls and 2 sacks while Jake Fird who started 11 games in 2019 and was #2 tackler with 73 added 11 tkls. LB Mack is the teams best pass rusher. The LB's look solid. In 2019 the secondary lost 3 of their top 8, who combined for 21 sts, 105 tkl, 3 int & 10 pbu including. They returned 5 DB who combined for 22 sts, 131 tkl, 4 int & 7 pbu led by S Momodou Mbye (9 st, 41 tkl, 1 int). In the spring they had to replace Mbye but the young unit had 10 pbu and 5 int's in 3 spring games. Coby Tippet was 2nd tm CAA in the spring with 3 ints. They add in UConn transfer ONeil Robinson and Western Carolina transfer AJ Rogers (128 tkl in 30 gms). The back 7 looks solid and almost everyone is back from the spring.

In '19 the ST Unit only needed to replace their P who avg'd just 31.8 ypg. They return K CJ Carrick (6-8 FG, L/40) and 2nd tm CAA RS Ahmere Dorsey (11.1 PR, 1 td, 28.4 KR, 2 td), who led the conference with 1,085 total return yds. Carrick had another solid year and after the spring is just 53 points away from becoming the schools all time leading scorer. P Davey Scaum-Bartocci avg 40.4 on 68 punts in '19 and had a solid spring. Dorsey was electric as both a KR (26.8) and PR (10.4) in 2019 but had to be replaced in the spring and Rhode Island managed just 17.0 on KR's and 1.33 on PR's. They need to uncover some returnmen to have an elite unit this year.

After having their first winning season in 17 years in 2018 the team slipped back to 2-10 in 2019. Last year they had their 2nd winning season in 19 years but it was just 2-1 and they were -211 ypg. While almost everyone is back from the spring including their solid trio of QB Hill, RB Brown and WR Frimpong this is a team that allowed 6.1 ypc rush in the spring and 6.3 ypc rush in 2019. Rhode Island was picked in the upper half of the Coaches/Media Relations Directors this summer and the CAA is a very tough

league. In a lot of the writeups I am giving the teams a chance at finishing higher than selected but I am going to pick the Rams to finish lower than the projected #6 finish.