

BETHUNE-COOKMAN 2021 PREVIEW

Terry Sims was named HC at Bethune-Cookman in '15 after serving as an associate HC since '10. In his first season, BCU went 9-2 and were named co-champions of the MEAC. However, because of their head-to-head defeat at the hands of North Carolina A&T, BCU was left out of the very first Celebration Bowl. Sims was named the MEAC COY following the '15 season and after a rebuilding year in '16 has posted seven-win seasons in each of BCU's previous three campaigns. Sims is 5-0 against arch-rival Florida A&M. BCU did not play in '20-'21 and has since realigned to the SWAC for '21 and beyond.

After spinning it's tires the previous two seasons, BCU was predicted to finish second in the MEAC in '19. However, a late-season skid that saw BCU drop three-straight, including an upset loss at Delaware State in front of just 879 fans led to BCU finishing fourth.

BCU averaged 326 ypg of total offense in '19 and scored 24 ppg. BCU struggled to protect the QB as they allowed multiple sacks in all but two games, which reflected in the fact that former QB Akevious Williams was able to complete just 54.3% of his passes. Williams was still able to pass for 10 TDs and rush for 10 more as he was a true dual-threat QB. BCU will have to replace him and have six QBs listed on their current roster all vying for the coveted starting role. Former Louisville transfer and Jr. Marcus Riley (PS#87) is an interesting piece to keep an eye out for in the QB battle. BCU has to replace their top two leading rushers from '19 including their top RB, but Sr. Que'shaun Byrd (307/4.4) and former Maryland transfer LaDerrien Wilson (PS#65, 106/3.5) will work to fill those holes. Sr. TE and '19 All-MEAC 2nd Team selection Taron Mallard is BCU's leading returning receiver (204/12.8) and will provide a big-bodied target for his new QB at 6'6" and 250. BCU returns four starting OL and will only have to replace their starting C from the '19 season.

Despite nine-straight victories over SWAC royalty FAMU, BCU was picked to finish fifth in the SWAC East Division at SWAC Media Day ahead of their first season in the conference. It's apparent why the SWAC media felt this way, as BCU has lost almost their entire defense from '19. The defense returns just four of it's top 15 tacklers, highlighted by Preseason All-SWAC 2nd Team honoree and Sr. Untareo Johnson. The DL does return it's top tackler from '19 and two of their top three including Jr. Judas McKenzie (7.5/3.0). The LBs for BCU have lost their top two tacklers and three of their top four from '19 but return Johnson (3.5/2.0). The secondary has been hit the hardest, with their top five from '19 all gone with six of their top seven tacklers from '19 no longer available. The lone holdover from the top-end of the secondary is former PITT transfer and Sr. Henry Miller (PS#91). BCU allowed 26 ppg on 394 ypg of total offense, with teams rushing for 194 ypg and throwing for 200 ypg. Expect teams with solid passing attacks to lean heavily on the throw when matching up with BCU.

Two-time All-American KR Jimmie Robinson will be sorely missed on ST for BCU after another great season in '19 (26.7/1). RB Que'shaun Byrd has been described by HBCU Gameday as capable of scoring anytime he can get his hands on the ball and has served previously as a backup KR. BCU will also have to replace their PR from '19. Jr. Benjamin Lennon, who transferred from FBS Utah after serving as their starting punter in '20 (38.9), will take on the same role at BCU. So. K Xavier McDonald averaged 53.0 yds per kickoff in '19 with nine TBs and converted 6/8 FGAs with a long of 39 in '19.

BCU is realigning conference's while trying to fill a plethora of holes on both sides of the ball, including special teams. While HC Terry Sims has built a consistent winner in Daytona Beach, '21 may be a year of adjustment for BCU. Peeking into the rearview mirror and noting BCU has technically lost three out of four headed into this season, the writing may already have been on the wall that a year of transition was on the horizon. BCU will remain formidable in the trenches but has lost a lot of talent at the skill positions and on the perimeter defensively. The loss of a true gamebreaker on ST like Robinson will also be felt throughout the season. BCU should concentrate on staying healthy and improving throughout the course of the regular-season so they're ready to defend their nine-game winning streak in the Florida Classic.