

HOWARD 2021 PREVIEW

Howard has struggled to maintain a consistent winner since HC Steve Wilson ('89-'01) and have seen some very down stretches in recent history, winning two or less games on five separate occasions since '08. Howard went 1-10 and 2-9 in '15 and '16, respectively, but turned it around for a truly memorable 7-4 campaign in '17. '17 was highlighted by the biggest upset in major college football history when the 45-point dogs traveled to Las Vegas and beat UNLV 43-40 behind a stellar performance from true freshman Caylin Newton (330 total yds), the younger brother of college football legend Cam Newton. All signs were pointing up for the program as Howard boasted the MEAC Rookie of the Year in '17 at QB (Newton). However, the program's inconsistencies reared its ugly head once more. TO margin went from +7 in '17 to -7 in '18, and the team fell to 4-6, despite outgaining opponents by 22 ypg. The wheels came completely off in '19, as the team went spiraling downward with a -13 TO margin and -152 ypg to finish 2-10. After two stellar seasons in '17 and '18, Newton played in just four games in '19 and has now followed his brother's footsteps to Auburn. HC Larry Scott (4-2 as interim HC at Miami (FL) in '15) was introduced after the conclusion of the '19 season and made his debut in the spring of '21, where Howard dropped both their games to MEAC doormat DSU. Scott will have had more than a year and a half at the helm before his team takes the field for his first full season and is returning every single meaningful player from the shortened '20-'21 spring season.

Howard's offense averaged 448 ypg while rushing for 217 ypg (4.8) in '17 behind true freshman QB Caylin Newton. The offense was dynamic, as it rushed for over 300 yards in three games and passed for over 300 yards in two separate games. In '18, it was explosive, as it averaged 471 ypg while now passing for 278 ypg. The offense passed for over 300 yds five times and over 400 twice, including an eye-popping 484 vs FBS opponent Ohio. The offense still also managed to top 215 rushing yds in six of their games. Howard returned its star QB, three of its top five rushers, as well as three of its top WRs. Somehow, the offense nearly disappeared entirely. Howard averaged just 302 ypg of total offense, including just 173 passing ypg. The offense failed to top even 100 yds passing in three different games and managed just one game of 300 yds passing after lighting it up through the air just a year previous. The rushing attack also bottomed out to just 129 ypg (3.2), failing to top 100 yds rushing in four different games, including managing just 1 yd rushing in a 79-0 beatdown at the hands of Maryland to kickoff the '19 season. So. Quinton Williams is the incumbent starter at QB after taking over for Newton in '19 and starting both games of the '20-'21 shortened spring season. At 6'4", he has potential and the most legitimate size of any QB on the roster. Williams is also the only QB with any in-game experience at the position to speak of. Jr. Josiah Crute made a splash in the '18 Circle City Classic as a true freshman, gaining 83 yds (7.6) in a victory over B-C. Crute was the second leading rusher in '19, gaining 323 rushing yds (5.2). Someone to keep an eye out for this upcoming season will be true freshman Jarett Hunter. Hunter was the leading rusher after both spring games in '21, averaging 36.0 rush ypg (4.2), but also led Howard in every single receiving category. Hunter averaged 57.0 receiving ypg (16.29). He has the possibility to be a real weapon out of the backfield and would pair very nicely with Crute as a thunder-and-lightening attraction. Howard has lost its top six WRs from '19 and as previously mentioned, a RB led in every single receiving category in the shortened '20-'21 spring season. Although Williams was competent as a true freshman (6/6, 55.7%), the lack of depth and experience at WR won't help his maturation and development as a QB. Instead, Williams will be tasked with helping to bring along and develop his WRs alongside him. This has already proven shaky, as Williams' completion percentage dropped to 47.1% in Howard's two games vs DSU in '20-'21. The OL returns three players with starting experience from '19 and returns the entire unit from the shortened '20-'21 campaign. Unquestionably this unit will lean on Sr. LT Phillip Flemming, who has started nearly every game at blindside since '19. Jr. Branden Johnson is a Swiss Army knife along the line, who started at three different positions in '19 (RG, RT, LG) before settling into the starting C role this spring.

Simply put, Howard has not been good on defense. In '17, teams did whatever they wanted to Howard, averaging 221 rush ypg and 222 passing ypg. In '18, Howard gave up 449 ypg and 34 ppg. The defense ceased to exist in '19, allowing 455 ypg and 45 ppg. Teams ran the ball on Howard with ease, averaging a ridiculous 5.9 ypc. The team's success in '21 will rely entirely on the ability of their defense because it brings back far more experience than the offensive side of the ball and must be far more accountable and dependable than they were in '19 if they want to be competitive. A key spot will be upfront, where despite the turmoil, the sack rate has improved each of the previous two seasons. After posting a measly 3.7% sack rate in '17, that rate increased to 4.2% in '18 and 4.3% in '19. The DL could very well be the strong suit of this defense, as it returns three full-time starters from '19 and two more with starting experience. So. Deion Harry dominated upfront in spring action, leading the team in tackles and posting 2.0 sacks in two games. Adding him to the experienced group of DL could bring about even more improvement to this unit that is returning its top two tacklers and three of their top four from '19. So. Christian White has been a full-time starter at LB since arriving in Washington D.C. in '19 as a true freshman. However, he is the only returning starter to the LB core and will be asked to lead a group of young LBs while still just a So. himself. If not the DL, the backend will surely be the strength of this defense and possibly the entire team. All four starters and leading tacklers from the secondary in '19 are set to return, including the team's leading tackler in '19, So. Ray Williams. Sr. Aaron Walker, Jr. Rodney Dennard (team-high 3 INTs in '19), and fellow Jr. Jalen Smith bring desperately needed talent and experience to a defense that has struggled since before their arrivals to campus.

Sr. Isaiah Moore will be the strength of the special teams. Moore is an experienced punter who pinned nine punts inside the 20-yard line in '19 with five punts of 50+ yds. Howard will have to replace their PK and KOS from '19, as well as their RS. However, Jr. K Faraji Woodson converted 7/8 FGAs in '18 and looks to return to both PK and KOS duties in '21.

HC Larry Scott will have an incredibly difficult challenge ahead of him in '21. Howard won just two games in '19, with a win over DSU as one of their two victories. Howard dropped their only two games in the shortened '20-'21 spring season, both to DSU. Howard could very easily be winless when it opens MEAC play vs Morgan St., their only other win from '19. Expect Howard to finish towards the bottom of the MEAC, with their showdown vs Morgan St possibly single-handedly determining the standing of both teams inside the MEAC for the remainder of '21. With that said, there still ought to be plenty of optimism in the years to come, with a new HC in Larry Scott and a young but talented and experienced defense.