

St Francis (PA)

Chris Villarrial is a 2x NEC COY entering his 11th season as HC at St. Francis. He is the winningest HC at SFU despite going just 3-19 in his first 2 seasons. He led the Red Flash to an NEC Title in '16. They've won at least 5 games in all but 1 season since 2012, going 4-7 in '18 but they improved to 6-6 in '19. The Red Flash were 5-6 in '17 (-1 ypg). They slipped to 4-7 in '18 and when you remove a blowout win over a D2 school they were -28 ypg. In '19 they were 4-6 and won their L/2 by 34 & 14 points to finish 6-6. The Red Flashes finished +42 ypg overall and +90 ypg against NEC foes but had a blowout loss early to James Madison to skew their numbers. St. Francis was one of 2 schools to not play in the spring so they are a step behind the rest of the conference.

In '17 St Francis dipped to their lowest ppg under Villareal since his first year, avg just 21.9 in '17. They improved to 26.2 ppg but only 292 ypg in '18. In '19 they had to replace their top QB, RB and WR but still put up 25.2 ppg and improved to 361 ypg. The Red Flashes had to replace their starting QB from '18 that had a solid 22-6 ratio. Jason Brown was inexperienced but had great size (6'4" 230). He threw for over 300 yards on 3 occasions including 385 vs Sacred Heart. Brown set the single season record for yards (3,084) and pass td's (28) while finishing with just 6 int's and was 2nd Tm All-NEC. Brown made a surprising decision to transfer to South Carolina. Former Pitt transfer Justin Sliwoski was the backup in '19, throwing for 47 yards on 11 attempts. Sliwoski is only a Soph, yet he's the oldest QB in the unit and the only one with experience. SFU lost their top 2 rushers entering '19. Joel Denley led with just 299 (4.6). Chris Wells was #2 with 61 (3.2) and Syaire Madden added 246 (3.7). Avery Milliner had 199 (3.2). Their lead rusher's numbers dropped but their top 4 basically matched '18, only going from 1038 to 1005 and ypc remained at 3.7. This year they lose their #1 and #4 rushers. They still have two that topped 200 rush in '19 and added JUCO transfer Marques DeShields. St. Francis lost their top 3 receivers after '18 but Ra'Shaun Henry and 6'8" TE EJ Jenkins proved to be the top unit in the NEC with Henry leading the NEC in both receptions (90) and yards (1,118, 12.4) and Jenkins added 779 (20.0) and a school record 13 td's. They were so good that both left for FCS school, Henry for Virginia and Jenkins joined Brown at South Carolina. SFU rushed for just 100 ypg (3.2, 18 sk) in '19. This year they only get 1 back with starting experience in LT Bailey Iboleon (6 st '19). Four starters depart from a unit that already wasn't performing well and 8 of the 13 Oline are Fr or rFr. They did add transfers Louis Mihota (Vtech) and Teagan McDonald (Old Dominion) but neither had experience at their previous school. This is the youngest offense in the NEC. They have to replace their all-time leading passer, the NEC's #1 WR, a TE that set a school record for td catches and 4 Oline starters.

SFU allowed under 300 ypg in B2B seasons in '17 (15 ppg, 287 ypg) and '18 (20 ppg, 290 ypg). In '19 they lost 9 of their top 15 tkl'rs including 6 of their top 9. The Red Flashes held 3 of their first 5 foes to 14 pts or less but allowed 44 & 31 in losses to James Madison & Columbia. After a shutout of Long Island where they allowed -1 rush y d they gave up 30+ in 3 straight. In their final 2 games they allowed just 8 & 21 points and held Wagner and Delaware St both below 300 yards. St Francis has allowed less than 4.0 ypc each year since 2016. In '18 they gave up just 120 (3.3) with 30 sacks (10.4%). They only lost 1 starter and 4 of their top 6 returned in '19. They allowed 116 (3.2) and sacks rose to 34 (8.9%). All 4 starters return this year and they've got their top 5 DL back. They are led by James Watkins who posted 11 tfl's in '19. This is the strength of the defense once again. The Red Flashes lost their #1, #9 and #14 tkl'rs at LB heading into '19. Da'Jon Lee was #2 in '18 and led in '19 with 93 tkls and led the FCS in the reg ssn with 24.5 tfl's. This year they lose 3rd Tm AA LB Lee along with his partner Brian Lee (#3 tkl'r, 12 tfl) and Jake Curry (#9 tkl'r). They get their #7 and #14 tkl'rs back but they need to someone replace 39 tfl's in this unit. SFU allowed 171 pass ypg (53%, 15-9) in '18. They lost 3 starters (#4, #8 and #11 tkl'rs). While they didn't allow 300 pass yds in a single game, they did give up 203 pass ypg but completion % dropped to just 51.4% (14-8). This year they lose #5 tkl'r Nick Rinella (2nd Tm All-NEC) and #7 tkl'r Dorian Jackson (1st Tm All-NEC) but they also return their #2, #5, #8, #11 and #13 tkl'rs. This was already a solid unit and with 5 of their top 7 back they are still solid but must replace 2 All conference guys.

Trevor Thompson made 12-19 fg's (L/42) in '19. Ryan Oliver avg'd 37.3 ypg (33.9 net). Nick Rinella was one of the top return men in the FCS, avg 11.8 with 2 td's and 25.1 KR. Thompson returns but the rest are gone and it's going to be hard to find a return man that affects a game the way Rinella did.

HC Villareal has been consistent as HC but he's got his work cut out for him this year. They must replace All-NEC players at QB, WR, TE, OL and LB and DB (2). In fact, 7 of their 8 All-NEC players from '19 are gone and it will be hard to replace 3 skill players that have moved on to Power-5 schools. They only have 5 home games and the rest of the conference may have passed them up so it will be hard to match '19's 4 win total.