

Bucknell

Dave Cecchini took over as head coach at Bucknell in '19 after spending 4 years as HC at Valpo. He has a similar rebuilding process at Bucknell as when he took over at Valparaiso after the Crusaders had won just 3 games in 4 years. After going 9-24 in his first 3 years, they were picked to finish 10th in the Pioneer by the Media and finished tied for third, and their 5 league wins were the most since 1961. After going 8-2 in '14, Bucknell had won 4, 4 and 5 games from '15-'17. In '18 the Bison finished 1-10 with their only win an upset at Holy Cross. They were outg'd by 162 ypg. In Cecchini's 1st year the Bison started 0-5 then won 3 of their L/6 and went from -116 ypg to -29 in Patriot League play. They went 2-2 in spring and were only -29 ypg.

In '18 Bucknell fell to just 13.4 ppg and 227 ypg. They brought in HC Cecchini, who has an OC background and took Holy Cross from 16 ppg in his first year to 30 ppg in his 3rd year. Bucknell averaged just 16 ppg and 281 ypg in '19 then put up 18 ppg and 268 ypg in spring ball. Jared Bitikofer started 5 in '18, throwing for 1,050 (55%, 7-8) but missed the L/3 with an inj. He returned in '19 along with 2 others with starting experience. Bitikofer started 8 in '19, throwing for 1,686 (57.4%, 10-6). John Chiarolanzio got 2 startw and threw for 399 (43.7%, 0-4) and Tarrin Earle threw for 98 (46.9%). Bitikofer threw for 606 (58.2%) in spg but had a 2-7 ratio. Earle threw for 209 (69.0%, 2-0). Bitikofer departs but he performed poorly last year and Earle played much better. In '19, 2nd Tm All-Patriot RB Jared Cooper returned (525, 3.3, 287 '18) and they got '17's leading rusher, Chad Freshnock back from injury. Freshnock led with 459 (4.1) and Cooper was #2 with 382 (4.4, 106 rec). Cooper returned in spring and had 115 (3.5). Cooper returns once again and Coleman Bennett (97, 2.8 spg) is back as well. The Bison returned 3 of their top 5 receivers in '19. Dominic Lyles led with 579 (16.1) and Brandon Sanders wasn't far behind with 530 (9.1). John McGuire added 248 (8.5) and Connor Holmes had 234 (7.5). Lyles and Sanders both performed well in spring with 291 (9.4) and 264 (11.5) respectively. Lyles and Holmes return while Sanders, McGuire and TE Alex Twiford (15 st 2Y) all depart. Only 3 of their top 8 are back from '19 but with their top guy back it's not a huge drop off. In '19 Bucknell returned 4 starters and had 7 with starting experience. The Bison ran for just 83 ypg (2.7, 29 sk) but that was actually an improvement from '18. They slipped to 62 (2.0, 9 sk) in spring. 13 different OL started between '19 and '20. 3 starters return in '20 and 7 with st'g exp are back. Five of those started games in spring.

In '17 Bucknell held foes to just 295 ypg. They returned 6 starters in '18 and they slipped to allowing 389 ypg and 28.3 ppg. In '19 they had 6 starters back again but slipped further to 424 ypg and 32.5 ppg allowed but only gave up 19 ppg and 320 ypg in Patriot League play. They held their first 2 opponents in spring to just 13 total points then gave up 31 & 33 in their L/2 but did hold 3 of their foes to less than 290 yards (296 ypg all'd) and only gave up 19.3 ppg. Bucknell returned all 3 Dline starters in '19. They shut down their conference foes, allowing just 96 (2.5) ypg but allowed 236 rush ypg (6.2) in conf play. Overall they allowed 160 rush ypg (4.2) and sacks jumped to 37. They played 4 conference foes in spring and only allowed 79 rush ypg (2.8, 13 sk). This year they lose DE Roger Mellado (#9 tkl'r '19), DT Nnamdi Unachukwu (#13 tkl'r, 9 tfl '19), NT John Hunt (12 st, 10 tkl '19), Joe Schiano (#10 tkl'r '19) and NT Clay Myers (4 st, #8 tkl'r spg). Only 1 starter returns and they get just 2 of their top 7 back. The Bison returned their #4, #6, #8 and #18 tkl'rs at LB in '19 but the overall defensive performance slipped. Two LB's started all 16 games between '19 and spring. The other started from the 4th game of '19 on. This year they lose Rick Mottram (#1 tkl'r, 8 tfl, 2 int '19), Gerrit Van Itallie (#2 tkl'r, 12 tfl, 6 pd '19), Simeon Page (#5 tkl'r, 13 sk 2Y) and Sam Chitty (3 st, 9 tkl '19). They lose all 3 starters from both '19 and spring so this unit needs completely rebuilt. Bucknell had just 1 starter back and finished dead last in pass eff D in '19 (65.6%, 29-8) but they were actually 3rd against Patriot foes (63.7%, 5-6). This year they lose SS Conner Romango (#4 tkl'r) and FS Brandon Benson (#3 tkl'r). Two starters return and they are in much better shape than they were entering '19.

Ethan Torres made just 6-12 fg's in '19 (L/38) but hit all 5 fg's in spring (L/39). Alex Pechin avg'd 47.3 ypp (43.4 net) but he was gone in spring and Ruben Anderson averaged just 33.2 (32.8 net). Bucknell avg'd 5.7 PR and 15.2 KR in '19 but did improve to 7.7 PR and 21.5 KR in spg. This year they lose Torres and need to find a more reliable punter but both return men are back.

In most years 10 starters returning would be considered inexperienced but this year they are one of the most experienced teams in the Patriot League. 8 starters are back on offense and their defense has dominated league play the last 2 years. The non-conference schedule is brutal but they should win a few games in league play.