

DAYTON FLYERS

When Dayton takes the field on September 4th at Welcome Stadium for its season opener vs Robert Morris, it will be a welcoming site for the Flyers' faithful followers. Due to the cancellation of its 2020 season because of the pandemic, Dayton will be competing on the gridiron for the first time since a 51-38 victory over Butler back on November 23, 2019. The washout of the Flyers' 2020 season marked the first time that Dayton did not play a football season since 1945 (no games for the 1943-45 seasons due to the war).

Head coach Rick Chamberlin enters his 14th year with the program and has had a plethora of success directing the Flyers. Chamberlin has led Dayton to a record of 93-40 overall, 70-26 in the Pioneer Football League (PFL) and has posted a winning season with the Flyers in all but one year (finished one game below .500 in 2017). He has directed Dayton to three first-place finishes (2009, 2010, 2015), three second-place finishes (2008, 2016, 2019) and guided the Flyers to their first and only appearance in the FCS Playoffs (in 2015). Chamberlin hopes to bridge the gap between the 2019 and 2021 seasons by picking up where his team left off in 2019, as Dayton ended the year on a high note by winning a season-high four consecutive games with all four victories coming by double figures (by a 17 ppg average). The four-game winning streak was the Flyers' longest winning streak since 2016.

The Flyers' offense features an outstanding offensive backfield, where Dayton is led by the dynamic duo of QB Jack Cook and RB Jake Chisholm, who were both named to the 2021 Preseason All-PFL Team. The pair (along with safety Brandon Easterling) were also named co-captains for the Flyers. Cook, the FCS active career leader in passing efficiency (162.0), landed himself on the Walter Payton Award watch list this season, which goes to the top player in FCS football. In 2019 he directed the highest scoring team in the FCS (42.6 ppg) and led the FCS in points responsible for per game (24.7 ppg). He was also third in pass efficiency (169.1) and fourth in passing touchdowns (33). His 33 TD's were a Dayton school record. Cook was named Second-Team All-PFL in 2019, one season removed from being named the PFL Offensive Freshman of the Year in 2018. His counterpart Chisholm led the FCS in 2019 in all-purpose yardage (204.3 ypg) with 1,129 yards rushing, 230 yards receiving and 684 return yards. He was named First-Team All-PFL after finishing second in rushing (112.9 ypg) and his 7.4 ypc average led the PFL and ranked second in the FCS. Chisholm accomplished all of that despite not moving into the starting lineup until the fifth game of the season and he finished the year with five consecutive 100-yard rushing games.

As experienced as the Flyers' offensive backfield is, the proven playmaking abilities of its receiving unit is polar opposite. Dayton receivers hauled in 193 catches for 2,716 yards (14.1 ypc) and 33 TD's in 2019, with 13 different players making a catch. However, only two of those players return in 2021, and one of them is RB Chisholm (21 receptions, 230 yards, 3 TD's). The only WR or TE who made a catch in 2019 that appears on the 2021 roster is WR Billy Skalitzky, who recorded seven receptions for 116 yards and 1 TD. Meaning, 85% of the receptions, 87% of the receiving yards and 88% of the TD receptions that were made by Flyers in 2019 will not return this season. By far, the most impactful of those losses is that of TE Adam Trautman, who

led Dayton in 2019 with a team-high 70 receptions, 916 receiving yards (13.1 ypc) and 14 TD receptions (all team-high marks). Trautman became Dayton's first non-scholarship player to be selected in the NFL Draft when he was picked by the New Orleans Saints in the third round (105th overall selection) of the 2020 NFL Draft. He became the first Flyer chosen in the NFL Draft since 1977 and was the highest NFL draft pick from Dayton since 1972. Trautman was also the highest draft choice in the 28-year history of the Pioneer Football League. WR's Ryan Skibinski (48 receptions, 823 yds, 10 TD's) and Kyle Butz (21 receptions, 348 yards, 2 TD's) are also gone making RB Chisholm as Dayton's leading returning receiver. While the sheer amount of those losses will be tough for the Flyers to offset, there will be plenty of opportunities to be had by the new receiving corps with Cook at QB to spread the ball around.

Dayton's defense allowed 34.7 ppg in 2019, as all 11 of their opponents scored 28 points or more per game vs the Flyers. In fact, Dayton was outgained by its opponent six times in 2019, including three times in games the Flyers won. However, part of Dayton's lofty points allowed stemmed from the increased offensive opportunities their opponents had due to the Flyers' high-scoring offense itself. Dayton allowed 477.9 yards per game with the rushing averages (239.3 ypg) and passing average (238.6 ypg) being nearly equal. Easterling, a 2021 Preseason All-PFL Team honoree and a 2019 FCS All-American and finalist for the Buck Buchanan Award (which goes to the top defensive player in the FCS), headlines the Flyers' defense. He posted a team-high 140 tackles (3.5 tackles for loss), 6 interceptions and 4 pass break-ups in 2019 and also led the FCS in solo tackles (7.5 tpg) and was second in total tackles (12.7 tpg). In fact, Dayton returns its top three tackles from two seasons ago as LB Grant Dyer (67 tackles, 4.5 tackles for loss) and 2021 Preseason All-PFL Team honoree Flyer Zach Rumpke (66 tackles, 3 sacks, 3 tackles for loss, 2 interceptions, 3 pass break-ups) also return to help anchor the unit. The Flyers racked up 14 interceptions as a team in 2019 (Easterling had a half dozen of them himself) but Rumpke and the CB duo of Sam Broom (32 tackles) and AJ Watson (23 tackles) combined for five interception and all return in 2021.

The Flyers' special teams unit was highlighted by 2021 Preseason All-PFL kicker Sam Webster, who connected on 8-9 FG attempts (89%) in 2019, which earned him Second-Team All-PFL honors. His only miss was a 52-yard attempt vs Drake but he did connect on a season-long 53-yard kick vs Robert Morris. Webster was also 56-60 on PAT's while posting 24 touchbacks on 35 kickoff attempts (69%). Punter Drew Nieman will look to fill the void of Allen Waltz (20 punts, 35.0 ypp, 29.2 net, 8 inside the 20). Nieman only punted twice in 2019 but he had a 42.0 ypp average with a long of 49.

Dayton was picked to finish fourth in the 2021 PFL preseason poll, trailing preseason favorite Davidson, San Diego and Drake, respectively.