

Eastern Kentucky 2021 Preview

Eastern Kentucky has seen quite a bit of success on the football field, as they have won 21 OVC titles and a pair of national championships in 1979 & 1982. However, Mark Elder went 21-24 in 4 seasons and failed to make the playoffs during his tenure here and did not have his contract renewed after the '19 season. Walt Wells, who was the TE coach here from '97-'99, the OL coach here from '00-'02, and the Asst HC/OL coach in 2015. In Wells first season they opened with a 59-0 loss at Marshall and a 56-10 loss at West Virginia. The next week ECU did pick up a win vs The Citadel and a few weeks later they nearly upset Troy (lost 31-29 on last second FG). ECU did pick up a win against #11 Central Arkansas and then closed the season with a win vs Western Carolina in the opportunity bowl.

ECU's offense had a down year in '17, as they gained 320 ypg and 21 ppg. The Colonels offense stayed consistent as they averaged just 325 ypg and 27 ppg in '18. The ECU offense jumped up to 364 ypg and 28 ppg in 2019. Last season in Wells first year the Colonels they put up 376 ypg and scored 24 ppg. QB Parker McKinney started the F/6 games before going OFY with an injury & for the season he threw for 1,358 yds (64%, 12-5). Dakota Allen would start the next 2 gms and hit just 48% and Isaiah Velez started the final game and in 2 games of action threw for 461 (65%, 3-2). McKinney does return this season and as long as he can remain healthy the QB position should be in good shape. The QB unit also adds former Auburn QB Cord Sandberg (PS#22). As for RB the Colonels lose their top rusher from last season as Alonzo Booth (9 st, 708, 4.7, 7 td) departs and their top returner from LY is Kyeandre Magloire (83, 4.0) & they do add former Purdue RB Da'Joun Hewitt (PS#117).

After averaging over 200 pass ypg from '15-'17 the Colonels averaged just 148 pass ypg in '18 and 159 pass ypg in '19. Last season the ECU pass attack put up just 80 yds vs Marshall but improved as the season went on, including throwing for 370 yds vs Troy and 373 yds vs W.Carolina. For the year ECU averaged 247 ypg. The ECU receiving corps was led by Keyion Dixon (9 st, 607, 16.4, 6 td) along with Jacquez Jones (5 st, 578, 14.4, 4 td) and Jackson Beerman (6 st, 482, 17.9). The bad news is that this unit loses 3 of their top 5 performers in Dixon, Beerman, and TE Ethan Bradds. Along with Jones, ECU will need Matt Wilcox (7 st, 229, 8.8) to step up and they add NIU transfer Jyrant Mitchell (PS#287). The OLine for ECU paved the way 129 ypg (3.7) and they gave up 23 sks in 9 gms incl 12 sks allowed in their L/3 games. The Colonels bring back a trio of starters on the OLine, but lose LG Jordan Johnson and RG Jackson Bardall. They also add Brad Davis (VMI transfer) who has started 31 games on the OLine. Alexander Woznick hit 11-14 FG's last year, but had a long of just 37 yds (0-2 FG's of 40+ yds). Woznick does depart this season so ECU will need to find a new FG kicker, but they do add ECU transfer Patrick Nations (PS#15).

ECU allowed 344 ypg and 27 ppg and collected 25 sacks in '17. The numbers did dip a bit to 372 ypg and 29 ppg allowed in '18, but did force 30 TO's. ECU's defense did improve in '19 to allowing just 325 ypg and 22 ppg. Last year the defense struggled early on as they allowed over 500 yds in 4 of the F/5 games and for the season they allowed 455 ypg and 33 ppg. The DLine did allow 201 rush ypg (5.0) including allowing 319 ypg (5.6) in their F/3 games. For the season ECU collected just 14 sks in 9 gms. The DLine was led by DE Kabbash Richards (9 st, 34 tkl, 6 tfl) along with DT Shane Burks (9 st, 24 tkl) and DT Quinten Floyd (6 st, 20 tkl). The lone starter lost up front is DE Elijah Taylor who started 8 games & had 25 tkl's & 2.5 tfl & they add former Bowling Green DL Roland Walder who started 5 games for the Falcons LY (22 tkl, 2 sk).

LY the ECU defense allowed over 30 ppg for the first time since '16. Despite the drop in production the LB unit still was solid as they were led by Matthew Jackson (6 st, 79 tkl, 8 tfl) and Kaleb Lundy (9 st, 54 tkl, 2 tfl) along with Eli Hairston (7 st, 42 tkl). All 3 of these starters return for the Colonels & they should have a much improved front 7 as 6 starters return overall. They also add Kyle Bailey from WKU (PS#166) who started 11 gms LY & made 76 tkl (5.5 tfl's) and D-II Central Missourui transfer Ubong Udom (44 tkl, 10 sk LY). Coming into LY ECU's pass defense had allowed over 200 ypg for 2 straight seasons. Last season the pass defense did not fare well as they were torched for 320+ yards 5 times in 9 games and for the year they allowed 255 pass ypg and gave up 65% completion to opposing QB's. The secondary was led by FS Daulson Fitzpatrick (9 st, 38 tkl, 5 pbu, 2 int) and SS Joseph Sayles (6 st, 35 tkl, 5 pbu) along with CB Davion Ross (8 st, 26 tkl, 4 pbu). All 3 of those starters return and the lone secondary starter gone is CB Allante Leapheart (8 st, 30 tkl, 6 pbu, 2 int). With 3 starters back this unit should likely improve from the numbers they allowed last season. ECU had 2 main punters LY in Thomas Cook (40.5 avg, L/59) and Phillip Richards (38.1 avg, L/58) and the team net was 35.0 yds. This unit loses Cook and Richards is on tap to be the main punter.

ECU opens the 2021 season with B2B road games at Western Carolina then at Louisville. The Colonels then get 4 straight home games including games vs Austin Peay and Indiana St. Three of their next 4 games are road games and this includes a trip to Stephen F. Austin and defending national champion Sam Houston. The Colonels then finish up with a home game against Jacksonville St. The Colonels do return 15 st's but must navigate a fairly tough schedule. They should be able to top 3 wins, but may miss out on the playoffs for the 7th straight season.