

Abilene Christian 2019 Preview

Abilene Christian is still relatively new to FCS-level football, as their program just moved up to that level in 2013. After the Wildcats won just 7 games between 2015-17, they made strides last season under 2nd year head coach Adam Dorrell. ACU started the year 2-1, and though they lost their next 3 games, each game was decided by 10 points or less. At 2-4 the Wildcats would win their next 4 games, including a 28-12 win versus eventual Southland co-champion Nicholls. The 6-5 mark by ACU was their best record since 2014, and they have momentum heading into year 3 under Dorrell.

In 2017 the ACU offense put up their lowest offensive totals as an FCS team, as they were held to 333 ypg and just 19 ppg. Last season ACU lost their main starting QB, but Luke Anthony (2 starts in '17) returned and was the #2 passer in the SLC, throwing for 3,019 yards (65.9%, 23-9). Smith is back again and will once again be a top-tier QB in this conference. Two of ACU's top 3 RB's were back in '18. Tracy James started 10 games and was the #1 rusher (764, 4.3, 6 TD) while Billy McCrary was #2 with 724 yards (8.2, 8 TD, 2nd Team SLC). Overall the top 3 RB's return for ACU and this unit will be strong again in 2019.

Despite returning just 1 of their top 6 receivers last season, ACU passed for 278 ypg which was their second-best mark since 2013. Josh Fink led the team with 644 yards (8 starts, 4 TD) and returns this season along with Kobe Clark (3 starts, 327). However, ACU does lose 5 of their top 7 receivers, which includes Chase Cokley (11 starts, 348), Kalin Sadler (6 starts, 348, 3 TD), and TE Cody Ennis (11 starts, 347, 2nd Team SLC). The Wildcats averaged just 88 rush ypg and gave up 27 sacks in '17. Last season ACU brought back just 1 starter on the OL, but impressively the rushing numbers went up to 161 ypg and the OL allowed just 16 sacks. This unit brings back just 2 starters and loses Bill Weber and Dakota Laws, who both made 2nd Team SLC in 2018. ACU does bring back their kicker Oscar Hernandez, who was 9-11 (L/46) on FG's last year.

On the defensive side of the ball Abilene Christian allowed an average of 454 ypg from '14-'16, but improved to 384 ypg in 2017 and last season their numbers stayed consistent. The Wildcats returned 6 starters and gave up 385 ypg. The DL returned 6 of their top 8 last year and improved their rush ypg allowed for a 4th straight season, holding teams to 114 ypg (3.5) on the ground. This season 6 of the top 8 DL return again, including Kameron Hill (2 starts, #13 tackler, 7 sacks) and DE Corey Smith (10 starts, #15 tacklers, 5 sacks). However, the 2 departures are DT Dante Hibbert (10 starts, #8 tackler, 5.5 TFL, 4.5 sacks) and DE Jonathan Picone (5 starts, #12 tackler, 5 sacks).

The Wildcats did have to replace 2 new starters at LB in 2018, but did improve their ppg allowed from 29 to 27. This season Jeremiah Chambers (11 starters, #1 tackler, 11.5 TFL, 3 sacks), Jack Gibbens (11 starts, #2 tackler, 9.5 TFL, 5 PBU), and Qua'Shawn Washington (10 starts, #6 tackler, 5 TFL, 3 PBU) all return & this unit should be even stronger in 2019. Last season ACU brought back 5 of their top 6 DB's but their pass defense took a step back, allowing 272 ypg and a 56.1% completion rate. This season 5 of the top 7 return including SS Bolu Onifade (8 starts, #3 tackler, 6 PBU) as well as CB's Adonis Davis (10 starts, #7 tackler, 11 PBU, 4 INT) and Koy Richardson (10 starts, t-#10 tackler, 3 PBU, 3 INT). The lone starter gone from this unit is FS Erik Huhn (10 starts, #4 tackler, 5 PBU). Also returning for ACU this season is punter Simon Laryea, who averaged 40 yards per punt (L/63).

While the WR's and OL are definitely a concern for the Wildcats going into '19, this team brings back quite a bit of talent, especially on defense where 16 of the top 21 tacklers return. ACU's schedule will be tough as they must play 2 FBS teams (North Texas, Mississippi St). When the Wildcats get into SLC play, their 4 games are against all 3 SLC playoff teams from 2018 (Nicholls, Incarnate Word, Lamar) and Central Arkansas, who is expected to contend in the SLC this year. This version of the Wildcats may be their best team yet since moving up to the FCS, but with a tough schedule to navigate, getting to 6 wins again in 2019 would be quite impressive.