

BUCKNELL 2019 PREVIEW

Dave Cecchini takes over as head coach at Bucknell. Cecchini spent the last 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 and they finished 6-5. After going 8-2 in '14, Bucknell had won 4, 4 and 5 games from '15-'17. Last year the Bison lost their first 4 games before pulling an upset at Holy Cross 19-16. They lost their last 6, finishing 1-10 and were outgained by 162 ypg.

From '15-'17 Bucknell averaged between 16-21 ppg each year. Last year Bucknell reached a new low, averaging just 13.4 ppg and 227 ypg. This year they bring in HC Cecchini who has an OC background and took the Crusaders from 16 ppg in his first year, to 30 ppg in his 3rd year. The Bison returned QB John Chiarolanzio last year after he led with 1,069 (55%, 5-6) in '17 (7 st). Chiarolanzio started the first 3 and Bucknell avg just 208 ypg, so Jared Bitikofer started the next 5. He threw for 267 vs Lafayette but was injured so Tarrin Earle started the last 3. Bitikofer played in 6 and led with 1,050 (55.1%, 7-8). Chiarolanzio threw for 434 (53.5%, 0-6). Earle added 386 (49.4%, 3-2). All 3 QB's return and they should put up improved numbers in the new system after avg 170 pass ypg last year. Last year Bucknell lost their #2 rusher to graduation then their leading rusher, Chad Freshnock was lost with an injury in preseason. Jared Cooper was the only rusher to top 100 yards in the season. He finished with 525 (3.3, 287 rec). Their next leading rusher, Marquis Carter played in just 1 game and had 81 yds (4.5). Joe Fex was #3 with 77 (2.3). This year they get back 2nd Tm All-Patriot RB Cooper and they get back Freshnock from injury, making this a vastly more experienced unit if they stay healthy. Bucknell lost their #1, #2 and #5 receivers last year. Brandon Sanders led with 516 (11.7). Alan Butler was #2 with 297 (11.9). Justin Bethea added 250 (11.9). This year they lose Butler and FB/TE Andrew Owers, who has 197 (8.6). With 3 of their top 5 back, they are in better shape than they were entering last year. Four starters returned on the Oline a season ago. The Bison dropped to just 57 (1.9) rush ypg and sacks increased to 39 despite the experienced unit. The only starter they lose this time is 2nd Tm All-Patriot C Pat Finn and 7 with starting experience return.

Bucknell held foes to just 295 ypg in '17, partly thanks to a stout pass defense. They returned 6 starters on last year's defense but it would be tough to match their lofty success from the season prior. The Bison slipped to allowing 389 ypg and 28.3 ppg. They lost 2 starters from a Dline that allowed 146 (4.0) in '17. The Bison allowed 172 (3.9) rush ypg but was better in Patriot League play, allowing 153 (3.6). This year they get all 3 starters back and 6 experienced DLine return. Their #9, #10, #12, #18 and #19 tkl'rs are all back. The Bison had to replace their #1 and #2 tkl'rs back on their LB unit. They got back 2nd Tm All-Patriot LB Simeon Page (9 sks in '17). The defense slipped to 28.3 ppg allowed. This year they lose SLB Joe Lauro (#1 tkl'r, 3 tfl) and MLB Matt Robinson (#3 tkl'r). Two starters return and the Bison get their #4, #6, #8 and #18 tkl'rs back. Bucknell lost just 1 starter in the secondary last year from a unit that allowed just 148 pass ypg (54%, 10-11) and were 1st in pass eff D in the Patriot in '17. The Bison allowed 217 pass ypg last year and fell to third in the Patriot in pass eff D (57%, 13-11). This year the Bison only get 1 starter back, though they do return 4 back with starting experience. Gone are CB Bryan Marine (#2 tkl'r, 3 int), S Bryan Sydnor (3 st, #11 tkl'r), CB Fisayo Oluleye (7 st, #15 tkl'r) and S Sean Newcomb (4 st, 9 tkl).

P Alex Pechin avg 44.5 ypp (38.8 net). Ethan Torres made 5 of 8 fg's (L/37) while Jack Chambers hit just 1 of 3 (L/34). This year they get 1st Tm AA Pechin and Torres back.

Bucknell won just 1 game last year, and 7 of their 10 losses were by double-digits. They get 9 starters back on offense and regardless of how much their new system helps, they can't help but improve off of last year's awful production. The Defense should still be solid with 6 starters back and 7 of their top 10 tkl'rs return but they lose their top 3 tkl'rs and there are concerns in the secondary. Overall the Bison should do better than just 1 win but it will take a few years for HC Cecchini to see significant improvement.