

COLUMBIA 2019 PREVIEW

When Columbia hired Al Bagnoli they were coming off B2B winless seasons. Bagnoli quickly turned the Lions around. After posting 5 wins in his first 2 years, the Lions made a remarkable turnaround, going 8-2 in '17 (+30 ypg) and they finished tied for 2nd in the conference. Last year Columbia returned 14 starters and were considered a contender to win the Ivy but slipped to 6-4 and were -82 ypg. Still it was their first back-to-back winning seasons since 1961-'62. HC Bagnoli is the winningest active FCS Head Coach and owns the 2nd most Ivy League Titles with 9 from his stint at Penn ('92-'14).

In 2013 Columbia hit rock bottom, avg just 7 ppg in a winless campaign. They made small incremental improvements each year from '14-'17, avg 10 ppg in '14, 14 ppg in '15, 19 ppg in '16 then 24 ppg in '17. Last year they had 7 starters back but had to replace a 2nd Tm All-Ivy QB and for the first time since '13 didn't improve, avg 23.1 ppg. The biggest issue Columbia had in '17 was their lack of consistent QB play. Four different QB's got at least 1 start. Ty Lenhart started the last 3 (2 wins) and led with 778 (59.2%, 1-5). Josh Bean started 4 and led in td's and completion % (61.4%, 4-1) throwing for 670. Dillon Davis started 2 and threw for 371 (55.4%, 2-5) and Ryan Suitt started 1 and threw for 78 (40.7%, 2-2). This year only Suitt departs so they have 3 experienced QB's. Also in the mix is Soph John Foreback and Sr Matt Dame. Last year the Lions had to replace their leading rusher. Ryan Young led with just 365 (3.7) and Dante Miller was #2 with 317 (5.2). Lynnard Rose added 200 (3.3). All 3 return this year so this is a much more experienced unit. Josh Wainwright was a 1st Tm All-Ivy WR in '17 with 1,001 yds (12.8). He returned as well as 9 of Columbia's top 10. Unfortunately Wainwright was injured in the opener and missed the rest of the season. Kyle Castner led with 430 (10.5). Ronald Smith was #2 with 399 (11.1). Kaleb Pitts added 290 (17.1) and Emerson Kabus had 201 (8.7). This year 9 of their top 10 return with the only loss being Castner. The unit is just as experienced as last year and with Wainwright is back from injury. 4 starters returned on the Oline last year. Despite the experience their rush ypg decreased for a 3rd straight year, avg 109 ypg (3.0). This year they return 4 starters again incl 3rd Tm All-Ivy C Parker Coogan. They lose RG Tyler Schonewolf (6 st) and bkp Markham Paukune. This is again an experienced Oline and should break their 3 year run of decreasing rushing numbers.

In 2017 Columbia was #2 in the Ivy League in scoring defense, allowing 18.6 ppg in conf play. Last year the Lions had 7 starters back. They lost 3 starters on a Dline that improved to 128 rush ypg allowed in '17. Columbia allowed just 98 rush ypg in their 3 non conf games but in their first 3 Ivy league games they allowed 816 (272 ypg). Over the final 4 they improved to allowing 139 ypg. For the season they allowed 148 (4.4). This year they get 3 starters back but lose 3rd Tm All-Ivy DT Mike Hinton (#7 tkl'r, 7 tfl). DE Daniel DeLorenzi returns after leading the Ivy with 9.5 sks (1st Tm All-Ivy). The strength of the defense was supposed to be the LB unit last year with their top 5 back. They lost Justin Woodley after 3 starts to an injury (11 tkl) and slipped to allowing 25.2 ppg. This year only 1 starter returns. Gone are Sean White (#2 tkl'r, 3.5 tfl) and Cal Falkenhayn (#4 tkl'r, 5 tfl). They get their #5 and #13 tkl'rs back plus Woodley returns from injury. Columbia was tied for first in the Ivy in '17 with 11 ints (51.3%). Three starters returned incl 2nd Tm All-Ivy SS Landon Baty (#2 tkl'r, 4 int). The Lions streak of improving their comp % allowed for 5 straight years ended with them giving up 54.5% (16-8). This year they lose both S's Baty (#12 tkl'r) and Ryan Gilbert (#1 tkl'r, 7 pd) as well as bkp S Jacob Young (#3 tkl'r). They have 4 back with starting experience incl both of their starting CB's.

Chris Alleyne took over fg kicking last year and made 15-18 (L/51) incl 6-7 from 40+. Drew Schmid avg 38.8 ypp (35.3 net). Mike Roussos avg 18.2 on PR, Will Allen avg 27.0 KR but Rossos also avg 25.4 with an 87 yd KR td. They must replace their first team All-Ivy K so they will be down a few notches.

This year Columbia returns 15 starters including 9 on offense, but they still have major question marks at QB and they lose their top 4 tacklers and their star K. They only get 3 Ivy League home games and travel to Princeton and Yale. If they can get consistent QB play, the Lions will contend for an Ivy League crown.