

VILLANOVA 2019 PREVIEW

In 2016, the Wildcats made their 2nd FCS playoffs in 3 years. They Beat St Francis at home but came up just short, losing 10-7 at South Dakota St. After 32 years as the Wildcats HC Andy Talley retired. He had led the Wildcats to 12 playoff appearances including winning the FCS Championship in 2009. In 2017 longtime Villanova Asst HC Mark Ferrante took over but despite both Coordinators returning, they shockingly finished just 5-6 ending a streak of 5 straight winning seasons.

Last year Villanova opened with a 4th quarter comeback 19-17 upset win over FBS foe Temple and they scored 31 straight in a 31-9 win over Lehigh. In their CAA opener they allowed Towson 35 straight in the 2Q and trailed 35-21 at HT in a 45-35 loss. The Wildcats scored 4 TD's on their first 12 offensive plays in a 49-7 blowout of Bucknell. They came up just short vs Stony Brook as their 2 pt conversion w/:56 failed in a 29-27 loss. They took eventual CAA champ to the wire losing on a final play 52 yd FG. The wheels then came off the bus as they were shutout in back-to-back games by James Madison (37-0) and New Hampshire (34-0). They never trailed at Richmond but they trailed William & Mary 24-7 into the 4Q and lost 24-17 guaranteeing a losing season. They upset playoff bound #17 Delaware in their season final pulling away in the 4Q for a 42-21 win. It was their 12th win in the last 13 meetings (7th straight) in the "Battle of the Blue" ending a disappointing season on a high note.

HC Ferrante returns for his 3rd season with just 11 returning starters overall and some big changes. Longtime OC Sam Venuto retired after 24 yrs at Villanova and 5th year DC Joe Trainer will not return. Ola Adams in his 5th ssn at Villanova was promoted to DC after being the STC the last 2 years. New OC Chris Boden, a former 3 yr starting QB here, spent the last 3 seasons as HC of ASA Miami.

The offense returns just 5 starters from the CAA's #6 scoring (25.0 ppg) & #6 total offense (370 ypg). They lose QB Zach Bednarczyk, who started 34 career games (20-14). Last year despite missing 3 games (8 st), he threw for 1,903 (64.4%, 14-6, 84 rush). Both backup QB's return in Jack Schetelich (2 st, 246, 53.1%, 1-2) and Qadir Ismail (1 st, 180, 37.9%, 1-1). They also add Campell transfer Daniel Smith, who started the last 2 years for the Camels. Last year Smith threw for 1,582 (58.9%, 13-3) and led Campbell with 668 rush yds (6.6, 13 td). The Wildcats lose 6 of their top 8 rushers including 2nd tm CAA RB Aaron Forbes (11 st), who led with 828 (5.4, 9 td, 172 rec). They return their #2 & #4 rushers in RB's Justin Covington (263, 4.3 1 td) & Jalen Justin (108, 4.9, 1 td). The Wildcats lose 3 of their top 5 receivers including their top 2 in WR Jarrett McClenton (9 st, 658, 16.9, 6 td, 107 rush) and TE Ryan Bell (4 st, 379, 11.5, 5 td). They return 5 of their top 8 led by WR Changa Hodge (8 st, 344, 15.6, 1 td), WR Josh McGrigg (194, 32.3, 1 td) and TE Todd Summer (148, 13.5, 1 td). The OLine must replace 3 starters including 2nd tm CAA LT Ethan Greenidge (10 st), who had 43 career sts, 3 yr starting LG Louie Cszaszar (11 st) and 2 yr starting RT Brandon Hitner (7 st). They return 3 OL who started last year in 3 yr starter C Paul Grattan (10 st), RG MJ Dumas (11 st) and backup LT Isiah Appiah. This looks to be a rebuilding year for the offense as each unit loses their top players and especially being under a new OC for the first time in many of the players lifetimes.

The defense returns 6 starters from the CAA's #6 scoring (23.4 ppg) and #3 total defense (313 ypg), but lose 5 of their top 11 tacklers. The DLine loses two 11 game starters in DT Bryan White (36 tkl, 3 tfl), who had 35 career starts & DE Jafonta Johnson (28 tkl, 5.5 tfl), who had 22 career starts. Their top 2 returnees are DE's Malik Fisher (10 st, 18 tkl, 5 sk, 4.5 tfl) and Aaron Seigle (1 st, 14 tkl, 4 tfl). The LB corps loses just 1 starter in MLB Jeff Steeb (9 st, 44 tkl, 5.5 tfl, 2 int). They return 4 of their top 5 LB led by Drew Wiley (11 st, 55 tkl, 9.5 tfl), Amin Black (3 st, 48 tkl, 4.5 sk, 4 tfl) and Keeling Hunter (10 st, 43 tkl, 1.5 tfl). The secondary loses 4 of their top 8 DB who combined for 20 sts & 121 tkl including FS Rob Rolle (10 st, 53 tkl) & FS Chucky Smith (2 st, 29tkl). They return 6 of their top 10 who combined for 35 sts & 197 tkl led by CB Jaquan Amos (11 st, 57 tkl, 2 int, 6 pbu), CAA Defensive ROY CB Christian Benford (8 st, 49 tkl, 5 int, 6 pbu) & SS Julian Williams (10 st, 39 tkl, 1 int). The defense does return 13 of their top 20 tacklers including 6 of their top 8 but will be under a new DC and 4 of their 5 starters lost were multiple year starters. Especially if the rebuilding offense struggles, the defense may be down a step this year.

The Special Teams unit returns all their top players including P/KO Nathan Fondacaro (41.0 avg, 25 TB/54 KO) and K Drew Kressege, who hit just 6-14 FG (L/40).

The Wildcats have a favorable non-conf schedule but do face Colgate in the opener. How they do in their home conference games vs Maine, Stony Brook, Richmond & Delaware will likely determine if they can break their streak of 2 straight losing seasons. While they have a shot at the a return to the playoffs may have to wait another year or two.