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 THE DOMINION *Post*
 SPECIAL EDITION

COACH BIDS • Q&A • WVU & OPPONENT PREVIEWS

WR SAM JAMES

RB TONY MATHIS JR.

BANDIT JARED BARTLETT

COACH NEAL BROWN

DL DANTE STILLS

CB CHARLES WOODS

OL ZACH FRAZIER

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Neal Brown

Head coach



Year 4 for the man in charge

WVU head coach Neal Brown is in must-win mode with the Mountaineers

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WVU head coach Neal Brown spoke at Big 12 Media Days in mid-July. This is a transcript of his news conference.

NEAL BROWN: It's a crazy time in college football, as everybody in this stadium knows, and I feel really confident about the leadership of our conference moving forward. I want to take a quick second and just make a note of who we have here representing our program: Defensive lineman Dante Stills; quarterback Charles Woods, neat experience for him because this is home for him, so he's able to come back; offensive

SEE BROWN, I-6

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Neal Brown

Head coach

BROWN

FROM PAGE I-2

lineman Zach Frazier; and receiver Bryce Ford-Wheaton; and then our Champion for Life is wide receiver Sam James, who's also with us. It's been a productive offseason. Staff adjustments on offense highlighted by the addition of offensive coordinator Graham Harrell has been very beneficial. We remade our roster to mirror the type of football team that we want to be, and that gives us the best opportunity to win in this league. We've had 33 additions to our roster since January. Our work ethic, our leadership and our team chemistry are much improved, and experiencing great success on the recruiting trail. Quick kind of preview, offensively, we return our top seven offensive linemen, two receivers, two of our top receivers in Sam James and Bryce Ford-Wheaton, two experienced tight ends, and then we've got a competition at the quarterback position I'm sure that you all want to talk about. Defensively, a lot of experience returning on our defensive line, like the athleticism of our linebackers with Exree Loe and Lance Dixon, huge addition to Lee Kpogba, it's going to be a difference maker there. At corner, I like the group we have, Charles Woods. We've had some experience through the transfer portal, as well. Inexperience at safety, you know. Then special teams-wise, return Casey Legg, who's Preseason All-Conference. Add a kickoff specialist that will compete for our field goal job, as well, in Parker Grothaus. And our punting job

is open. We play a tough schedule. It's been well documented. Two non-conference games, two rivalry games that are both on the road, 11 Power Five opponents, and then a great schedule here in the Big 12. It's going to be a big challenge for us.

Q: Since you've arrived at West Virginia, you've had tough, hard-nosed defensive teams. Will you be able to maintain that culture after going maybe a little more passing air-raid on offense and then losing some of the contributors that you lost on defense through the transfer portal?

NB: We think this defensive unit has the opportunity to be the best that we've fielded so far. We're never going to lose what makes West Virginia special, and that's toughness. We really try to mirror the mindset of our state, and West Virginia, it's a blue-collar group that goes to work, and are really proud of their heritage. That's the same fundamentals that we're trying to look for and trying to put on the field on the defensive side of the ball every Saturday. I like our group. It's a group that has had unique paths. If you look at a guy like Lee Kpogba, who came in the spring and will be our starting linebacker, who did not have a traditional path, but here he is, and we think he's got a chance to be one of the better linebackers in our league. You look at Charles Woods, FCS All-American that made the jump to Power Five football and had the leading coverage numbers in our league according to PFF data last year. We're a group that's going to be tough, physical. I like the pieces that we've added. I think through the portal

on defense what we were looking to add is guys that were experienced and that were selfless, that could be great teammates, and we've done that. I think the collection of players that we're going to have, our whole is going to be maybe better than each individual.

Q: You kind of touched upon new offensive coordinator Graham Harrell right there. Can you go into more detail about what he's been able to bring to the locker room so far? And what's been the biggest improvement you've seen in the offense with Harrell?

NB: I should expect a Lubbock guy to talk about Graham, right? No, here's what Graham has brought. He's brought a different energy about him. He's confident without being arrogant. He's extremely humble. It helps that he was a great player in this league, and I think that gets the players' attention on your current roster but also in recruiting. He's had great success at not only USC but at North Texas, as well. He's been able to have success with different types of players and different types of offenses. I'm excited about what he can bring. He's been a great staff member. I think we're going to see the benefits. The biggest for me is he's got a great feel on game day. So that's something that I think is going to be a huge positive, and it'll be not only for our players but for me, great feel on game day, so I'm looking forward to it.

Q: How much can Graham put in so early? Does it have to be incremental, or did he put a lot in the spring?

NB: We basically put everything

that we have in in the spring, and that's kind of – from a schematic standpoint and part of the reason why I felt like Graham was the best fit for us at West Virginia, schematically, we don't anticipate being a whole lot different. Where we're going to be different is in our preparation, in our practice habits, and in our ability to probably be more prepared going into each and every game. But from a schematic standpoint, everything that we were going to do, we installed in spring ball. We've been repping them all summer; and we'll use the fall camp practice schedule to refine those even more. But what we're going to run, we've had put in.

Q: Coach, you've indicated your support for the NIL process and have put a number of different programs in place. Are you concerned at all about the players' time management? That seems to have the potential to be another big drain on their resources.

NB: You know, I think that we live in an era now where there's a lot of pulls on our players' times, and the ability to manage time, not only for the student-athletes but for staff, for myself, gets harder and harder. I'm for name, image and likeness. I think I said this in this exact same chair here a year ago. We've got to figure out some guardrails on it where we can still help student-athletes, but it's not necessarily used as an inducement. But that is. A lot of our preparation for our players is about time management because we feel like the thing that everybody has the same is the same amount of time, and how you manage that is a real differential in the success

SEE BROWN, I-7



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Neal Brown

Head coach

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BROWN

FROM PAGE I-6

of each individual. So with name, image and likeness, that's been a huge part of what we're doing with the character development piece of our 5th Quarter Program.

Q: Neal, I don't know how involved you were in the discussions, but can you take us through the resumption of the Backyard Brawl, and how big is that for the Pitt and West Virginia programs?

NB: Well, it's an important rivalry. I wasn't there when the initial contract was signed to play Pitt. Shane Lyons, our athletic director, asked me about the continuation of the series, which we'll do later in the decade, and I was all for it. It's really important for us to play regional rivalries. The Backyard Brawl will be my first opportunity to be a part of it. Our fan base is extremely passionate about that game. So it's a game that I would be in favor of playing each year. I think it's a great kickoff for college football. We're not playing on so-called week zero, but we are the premier Power Five game versus Power Five opponent on Thursday night, and our guys are excited. It's been a great carrot for our guys as we've gone through winter, through spring ball, now through summer workouts to know that, man, we've got not only a game to look forward to but it's a rivalry game that's going to be on primetime.

Q: You have the longest trip out of just about anyone here. I'm wondering if you see UCF and some of these other longer trips

that are going to be added to the Big 12. Is that as big of an issue as some people make it out to be now with jets and stuff like that?

NB: It's not for football. I can only speak from a football perspective. The travel is not that big a deal. You're going to do four games, four away games, and at least a couple trips to Texas each year. Some years you're going to have five away games. But you're talking about the difference between a two-hour flight and maybe a two-and-a-half-hour flight. We're going to leave on Friday afternoon and get there Friday evening. The only thing that's detrimental is sometimes if you play a night game on the road, in Lubbock or in Fort Worth, then you're looking at a really early Sunday morning return. And so you've got to be careful how you handle that Sunday and Monday on the back end. Now, for Olympic sports, it's a different story. But in football, it's not as big an issue as maybe what it gets talked about.

Q: I'm curious what the anxiety level is among Big 12 football coaches with this realignment. In your mind do you think the Big 12 could position itself to be a third super conference, and would it have to add more teams to be able to do that?

NB: The good thing about it is I've got a lot of worries and a lot of concerns, but conference realignment is way down the list for me. Now, the guys that spoke first, it's probably a different story, right. For us, those decisions are not getting made by football coaches. Those decisions are getting made at a much higher level. I'll say — I'll repeat what I said in our opening

statement. I'm really excited about the direction of the Big 12 Conference. I think some things over the last few weeks have created a great opportunity for our league. From a West Virginia perspective, we played in — we're a little bit different than maybe some of the other schools whose uniforms are up here. We've played in multiple leagues over the last 50 to 75 years. We've even been independent. The one constant is that West Virginia football has always been successful and has always figured out a way to make it work. So from a long-term perspective, I have great faith that West Virginia football is going to be just fine. In the short term, I like the direction. I think we have some unique opportunities. I think the leadership of our conference has made some really good decisions with the additions, and I have strong belief that they will continue to do so.

Q: You added in a couple of transfers in the defensive back room, one of which was Jaylon Shelton from Tyler Junior College and Wesley McCormick from James Madison who has five years of starting experience. When you look back when you had one of the top defensive backs in 2019 in the conference, what have you seen from their development in your defense, and what have you seen from the leadership aspect of McCormick?

NB: When we looked at what we had returning in our secondary, we liked the youth that we had. We've got some guys that can really run that are in their first or second year within our program. The one thing that we were intentional about trying to improve

defensively is we've been a primary zone coverage team over the last two years, and we've had success. It's been successful for us. But we haven't been able to create as much havoc up front because when you play zone coverage, you only can rush four, five guys at one time. We wanted to get faster, more athletic in the back end so we could play more coverage so we could rush six and maybe even seven sometimes. Through our addition, and we've had several, Wesley McCormick who is a multiple year starter at James Madison at corner, really like his ability. We think he's got an opportunity to compete for a starting job. Jaylon Shelton has versatility that can play safety or corner that can really run. Jasir Cox from North Dakota State, multiple national champion, multiple year starter, gives us some flexibility to play both outside linebacker positions and our nickel position. We added Rashad Ajayi from Colorado State who started 35 games at Colorado State. So we've been able to add some guys — Marcis Floyd from Murray State who was there with us in the spring. When we're looking at that, we wanted to be more athletic, we wanted guys that had experience starting, and they all have experience starting outside of Jaylon, we're extremely excited about his athleticism, but we also wanted guys that added versatility and would check themselves at the door, meaning do what we asked them to do within the concept of a team. I've been really pleased with those guys so far, and I think that our secondary is going to be a real positive surprise to maybe some people that are in this room.



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Coach bios

Neal Brown, head coach**Birthday:** March 11**Hometown:** Danville, Ky.**Education:** UMass, 2002 (bachelor's); UMass, 2005 (master's)**Playing Career:** Kentucky, 1998-00; UMass, 2001-02**Family:** Wife, Brooke; children, Adelyn, Anslee, Dax

Neal Brown is in his fourth year as the head coach at West Virginia.

Since arriving in Morgantown in January 2019, Brown has covered a lot of territory representing Mountaineer Football as its chief ambassador, ensuring the great story about his program is told to everyone.

One of the first player initiatives that Brown implemented for the team was the 5th Quarter program in 2019, officially announcing it in 2020, to assist in the development of the total player, not only on the field, but off and for life beyond graduation. The pillars of the program are character development, leadership development, real life, social responsibility and career development. With the name, image and likeness legislation enacted in July 2021, Brown did his due diligence in advance to ensure that his players were prepared, no matter how involved the process becomes in the future.

Another component of the 5th Quarter program is the Bridge program. Its goal is to introduce the student-athletes to the college experience when they first enter WVU and give them their final training and prepare them before they embark into



life after graduation.

Brown has supported and championed program leadership by the players and above all a dedication to the individual student-athlete. His mission has been to develop each

player as a complete person, not only on the field, but off, and for each to continuously build themselves and their brand to make a difference in the world after their football career is finished.

In September 2020, Brown was named the honorary head coach for the AFCA AllState Good Works Team, honoring him for his commitment to leadership, the Morgantown community and Mountaineer Nation as a whole. In January, he was named to the AFCA's Board of Trustees.

The 2021 squad finished with a 6-7 record but had its share of positives, including earning a bowl bid to the Guaranteed Rate Bowl, its second in a row under Brown. WVU earned a spot in a bowl game in 18 of the last 20 years and are one of only 15 programs in the nation to accomplish that feat. Running back Leddie Brown rushed for 1,000 yards for the second year in a row and WVU was fourth in the Big 12 in average passing yards per game (247.9). The Mountaineers defense finished No. 5 nationally in red zone defense, No. 18 in the fewest first downs allowed and No. 29 in third-down defense.

Brown graduated from UMass with a bachelor's degree in business management in 2002 and earned his master's degree in business administration in 2005.

Graham Harrell, offensive coordinator**Birthday:** May 22**Hometown:** Ennis, Texas**Education:** Texas Tech, 2007 (bachelor's)**Playing Career:** Texas Tech, 2005-08**Family:** Wife, Brittney; children, Hawk, Mia

Graham Harrell is in his first year on the Mountaineer coaching staff as the offensive coordinator and the quarterbacks coach. Harrell comes to WVU after serving as the offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach at USC for the past three years (2019-21).

In 2021, USC led the Pac-12 and was No. 17 nationally in passing offense (298.3) and red zone offense (.902), No. 20 in third-down conversion percentage and No. 24 in total offense (443.9). Receiver Drake London was named the Pac-12 Offensive Player of the Year and earned a spot on several All-America teams.

In 2020, USC's passing offense ranked No. 11 nationally (first in Pac-12) at 319.3. Quarterback Kedon Slovis made All-Pac-12 first team while ranking in the top-20 in completions (first at 29.5), passing yards (sixth at 320.2), total offense (No. 13 at 310.7) and completion percentage (No. 18 at .670), all tops in the Pac-12. Wide receiver Amon-Ra St. Brown also was an All-Pac-12 first teamer.

In Harrell's first year at USC in 2019, the Trojan offense averaged 455.4 total yards (335.8 passing) and 32.5 points — significant improvements from 2018, when the figures were 382.6, 249.1 and 26.1 — while ranking in the top-25 in



completion percentage, passing offense, passing efficiency, total offense, third down conversions and first downs. The 2019 Trojans also set school season pass marks for total passing yards (4,365),

completion percentage (71.0%), completions (365) and attempts (514).

Under Harrell's tutelage, true freshman quarterback Kedon Slovis was a Freshman All-American first teamer and the Pac-12 Offensive Freshman of the Year, completing a school-record and NCAA freshman record 71.9% of his passes for a USC frosh record 3,502 yards with 30 TDs, including a school-record 515 passing yards against UCLA (one of a USC record four games with 400-plus passing yards), to rank in the top-20 in completion percentage, passing yards, completions, passing efficiency, passing TD and total offense (his 167.9 passing efficiency rating was a USC record).

Wide receiver Michael Pittman Jr., who won the 2019 Pop Warner College Football Award and was a finalist for the Biletnikoff and Witten Awards, was in the top-20 in receptions, receiving yards and receiving TDs.

Harrell was a record-setting quarterback for Leach at Texas Tech from 2005-08, finishing his career with an NCAA-record 134 touchdown passes, the second-most career yards in NCAA history (15,793) and the third-highest career passing average (351.0). He also set NCAA career marks for pass completions average (31.2), as well as most games gaining 400-plus passing yards (20).

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Coach bios

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Jordan Lesley,
defensive coordinator**Birthday:** Dec. 15**Hometown:** Fulton, Miss.**Education:** Troy, 2006 (bachelor's);
Troy, 2007 (master's)**Playing Career:** Troy, 2000-04**Family:** Wife, Ann-Katherine; children, Mary-Kate, Mae-Blake, Jordan Blake Jr.

Jordan Lesley is in his fourth year on the Mountaineer Football coaching staff and third year as the defensive coordinator. The 2021 Broyles Award nominee coaches the outside linebackers for the second year after working with the defensive line his first two years.

Under Lesley's guidance, the Mountaineer defense competes each year as one of the best units in the Big 12 Conference as well as in the nation. Fifth-year senior defensive tackle Dante Stills was an All-Big 12 Conference First Team honoree and four other players were named to the all-conference third team by various organizations.

WVU finished No. 5 nationally in red zone defense, an improvement of 67 spots from the year before, was No. 18 in fewest defensive first downs allowed and in fourth-down percentage, No. 29 in third-down defense (.347), No. 37 in total defense (350.1) and No. 39 in tackles for loss (6.5), an improvement of nine spots from the 2020 season.

Defensive tackle Dante Stills was No. 4 in the Big 12 in tackles for loss and No. 10 in sacks, while defensive end Taij Alston was No. 15 in sacks and



No. 16 in tackles for loss. Linebacker Josh Chandler-Semedo was the third-leading tackler in the league (8.5) and safety Sean Mahone was No. 18 (6.2). Cornerback Charles Woods was No.

13 in passes defended (8) and Daryl Porter Jr. was No. 14 (7). Woods was No. 4 in fumbles recovered and safety Saint McLeod was No. 8 in forced fumbles.

The WVU defense had an outstanding year in 2020, leading the nation in pass defense and ranking No. 4 in in total defense (291.4), No. 21 in scoring defense (20.5), No. 23 in interceptions (11), No. 24 in pass efficiency defense (121.52) and No. 28 in rushing defense (131.8).

Darius Stills was named the program's first Consensus All-American since 2006 and 12th in school history. He was the Big 12 Defensive Lineman of the Year, an All-Big 12 Conference First Team lineman for the second straight year and was signed as a free agent by the Las Vegas Raiders. Over his final two years, he finished with 10.5 sacks and 21 tackles for loss.

Akheem Mesidor was an All-Big 12 Conference Second Team honoree and also earned freshman All-America honors, and Dante Stills earned All-Big 12 Conference Second Team honors by the AP.

Lesley was a versatile player at Troy and was a key part of teams that successfully made the transition to the FBS ranks. A two-year starter at tight end, Lesley helped lead Troy to the 2004 Silicon Valley Bowl and was named a team captain.

ShaDon Brown,
cornerbacks**Birthday:** Nov. 20**Hometown:** Danville, Ky.**Education:** Campbellsville, 2003 (bachelor's); University of the Cumberland, 2008 (master's)**Family:** Wife, Rhonda; children, Shaelyn, Braylon, Keenan

ShaDon Brown is in his second year as the co-defensive coordinator and oversees the defensive secondary.

In his first year as the Mountaineers secondary coach, WVU was tied for No. 2 in the Big 12 Conference in interceptions and was No. 3 in passing defense, giving up only 211.2 yards game



through the air. WVU was No. 5 in the nation in red zone defense and No. 18 in fewest first downs allowed.

In conference only games, Charles Woods was tied for No. 11 in the league in interceptions and No. 13 in passes defended. According to PFF College, he had the lowest pass rating allowed in coverage among Big 12 cornerbacks (22.1).

Brown came to Morgantown after serving as the safeties coach at Louisville for two years. In 2020, the Louisville secondary led the Atlantic Coast Conference in passing defense and was No. 17 nationally, giving up 189.2 yards per game.

Andrew Jackson,
defensive line**Birthday:** Feb. 18**Hometown:** Middletown, N.Y.**Education:** LIU Post, 2011 (bachelor's)**Playing career:** LIU Post, 2007-11

Andrew Jackson is in his second year as the defensive line coach.

In 2021, the defensive line finished with 20.5 sacks and 40 tackles for loss and were ranked No. 39 nationally in tackles for loss. Defensive lineman Dante Stills earned All-Big 12 Conference First Team honors by the league coaches, Associated Press and Phil Steele after leading the defense with seven sacks and 15 tackles for



loss. He ranked No. 4 in the Big 12 in tackles for loss and No. 10 in sacks.

End Taij Alston was named one of the Mayo Clinic semifinalists for Comeback Player of the Year,

lineman Jordan Jefferson was named an All-Big 12 Third-Team honoree by PFF College and lineman Akheem Mesidor was named an All-Big 12 Third-Team selection by Phil Steele.

WVU finished No. 5 nationally in red zone defense, an improvement of 67 spots from the year before, was No. 18 in fewest defensive first downs allowed and in fourth-down percentage.

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10

West Virginia Mountaineers

2021: 6-7 (4-5 Big 12)



William Wotring/The Dominion Post

West Virginia defensive lineman Dante Stills

BY SEAN MANNING

SManning@DominionPost.com

WVU head coach Neal Brown is entering his fourth season at the helm for the Mountaineers, but the results have been about as average as it can get since he took over in 2019.

With a mark of 17-18 the last three seasons, pressure is beginning to mount for Brown, but this season's edition could be the fresh start the Mountaineers need. With three full recruiting classes under Brown's belt, this is his team now, and new faces will be evident in all three phases, whether it's because of eligibility expiration or losses in the transfer portal.

With the fanbase already sitting in pins and needles, and traditional rivals Pitt and Virginia Tech awaiting in nonconference play, this is a critical season for Brown's tenure. Inexperience that some could say is youthful energy, mixed with veterans in the trenches who have been through the grind, will make for another "wait and see" season.

Offense

Maligned quarterback Jarret Doege decided to use his final year elsewhere, so now, under new offensive coordinator Graham Harrell, the offense as a whole, especially the QBs, will have a different look.

JT Daniels transfers in from Georgia, having thrown for nearly 5,000 yards and 32 touchdowns in his college career. Sophomore Garrett Greene played significant snaps last season as a change-of-pace to Doege, mainly using his legs to make plays. However, he showed little in the passing game when he got his opportunities. Will "Goose" Crowder, who redshirted last season in his first year on campus, brings a more pocket-passer presence into the fold, and the coaches mentioned his continuous improvement throughout last season and the spring. True freshman Nicco Marchiol, the Arizona high school player of the year in 2021, is a lefty who showed the ability to be a dual-threat that helped him earn his lofty recruit ranking.

A replacement for Lедdie Brown at running back is needed, though it appears junior Tony Mathis will be given the reins after a strong ending to last season. Sophomore Justin Johnson and redshirt-freshman Jaylen Anderson will provide depth to what Neal Brown considers his most talent backfield since he's been at WVU.

At wide receiver, Bryce Ford-Wheaton and Sam James could be two of the best returners in the Big 12, and Kaden Prather has superstar potential. Depth is a concern, otherwise, but Reese Smith and Jarel Williams, as well as newcomers Jeremiah Aaron and Cortez Braham, will be in the mix. Mike O'Laughlin is a threat to catch the ball at tight end, and Colorado State transfer Brian Polendey will be an extension of the offensive line.

The offensive line is expected to be a strength with all five starters returning, anchored by Wyatt Milum at left tackle.



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Defense

Similar to the offense, the defensive line returns a boatload of experience, led by Dante Stills, who decided to use his extra year of eligibility to return. Taijh Alston is another veteran on the edge. There are talented players waiting in the wings, as well, to provide depth.

At linebacker, Syracuse transfer Lee Kpogba will man at Mike, while Lance Dixon and Exree Loe return at the Will spot. The coaches hope the Bandit position evolves with Jared Bartlett and Lanell Carr, playing as both an extra rusher and pass defender.

The secondary was devastated with transfers and eligibility exhaustion, so there will be new faces at every position but one. Charles Woods started toward the end of last season and played well down the stretch, and expect Andrew Wilson-Lamp, Wesley McCormick, Rashad Ajayi, Naim Muhammad and Mumu Bin-Wahad. North Dakota State transfer Jasir Cox and Davis Mallinger are the favorites at Spear safety, while Aubrey Burks, Hershey McLaurin and Marcis Floyd.

Specialists

Casey Legg is back at kicker after making 19 of 23 field goals last season, but Florida State transfer Parker Grothaus will take over kickoff duties. Australian freshman Oliver Straw and Kolton McGhee will likely handle the punting duties.

At kick returner, Jeremiah Aaron was an All-American returner at JUCO, but Sam James and Jaylen Anderson could handle the duties, and the same can be said for punt return.

PLAYERS TO WATCH

WR Bryce Ford-Wheaton, Sr. — Has shown flashes of being a big-time threat and will be asked to lead the wide receivers group.

OT Wyatt Milum, So. — Took over the starting spot as a true freshman last season and will anchor the left side of an experienced offensive line.

DT Dante Stills, Sr. — A surprise to many, Stills return for his free year and will be the leader of an inexperienced defense.



William Wotring/The Dominion Post

West Virginia wide receiver Bryce Ford-Wheaton

P

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12 Pittsburgh Panthers

2021: 11-3 (7-1 ACC)



Pitt defensive lineman Calijah Kancey

Pitt Athletics

BY SEAN MANNING

SManning@DominionPost.com

Pitt had a season to remember last year, winning 11 games with an ACC championship, a Heisman-contending quarterback and a Biletnikoff-winning wide receiver.

It seemed the Panthers put many of the pieced together for the first time under coach Pat Narduzzi, but now that QB is off to the NFL and that WR transferred out to the West Coast at USC.

However, the entire offensive line is back and a strong corps of what was a strong defense last year also returns.

Can Narduzzi and Pitt keep it going? Time will tell, and it starts with the return of the Backyard Brawl against WVU.

Offense

Former USC quarterback Kedon Slovis is a former Pac-12 freshman of the year from 2019, but has regressed every year since, leading him to transfer to Pitt. While Slovis is the favorite to replace Kenny Pickett, a first-round pick of the Steelers, Nick Patti, who started the Peach Bowl last year, could challenge.

Pickett is gone, as is offensive coordinator Mark Whipple, now replaced by Frank Cignetti Jr. Cignetti Jr. is the son of former WVU coach Frank Cignetti. He brings a run-first mentality to the offense, which the Panthers may need with the loss of wide receiver Jordan Addison, who opted to transfer to USC after catching 100 passes for 1,593 yards and 17 TDs last year.

However, there is still a host of talented wideouts returning, including Jared Wayne (six touchdowns, 658 yards). Akron transfer Konata Mumpfield was a freshman All-American last year after catching eight TDs for 751 yards.

All five starting linemen return and will block for a host of running backs, including Israel Abanikanda, Vincent Davis and Rodney Hammond Jr., who combined for 1,748 yards and 16 touchdowns.

Defense

The Panthers' main goal is to get to the quarterback, and with six All-ACC players from 2021 back, they could have another stout unit that finished second nationally in sacks.

Pitt will also be hard to run on after it allowed just 89.3 yards per game last season, led by defensive tackle Calijah Kancey, who had 13 tackles for loss.

Two other starting linemen are back, and senior SirVorcea Dennis is back at linebacker, though the rest of the unit will have newcomers aboard.

In the secondary, which could be considered an area of weakness, has three starters back, but the overall stats from last season were not great. The Panthers were 12th in the ACC and 115th nationally in passing yards allowed at 264.3 per game.



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Specialists

Kicker Sam Scarton is back after making 17 of 21 attempts a year ago, and Australian freshman Sam Vander Haar will likely take over at punter.

Addison's loss will not only be felt at wide receiver, but also kick and punt return, though Abanikanda has a kickoff return for a score in his career.



AP photo

Pitt coach Pat Narduzzi

PLAYERS TO WATCH

QB Kedon Slovis, Sr. — Slovis probably won't completely fill the shoes left by Kenny Pickett, he will be tasked with at least being able to balance in them.

DT Calijah Kancey, Jr. — The anchor of Pitt's defense, Kancey had seven sacks and 13 TFLs last season.

LB SirVocea Dennis, Sr. — At middle linebacker, Dennis led the team in tackles a year ago with 87.



AP photo

Pitt linebacker SirVocea Dennis



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Kansas Jayhawks

2021: 2-10 (1-8 Big 12)



Kansas safety Kenny Logan

Kansas Athletics

BY SEAN MANNING

SManning@DominionPost.com

It seems odd to say after a 2-10 season, but Kansas head coach Lance Leipold appears to have the Jayhawks moving in the right direction — maybe not as a contender, but as a team that could finally pull off a few Big 12 wins.

KU beat Texas in overtime last year, and followed that up with close losses to TCU and WVU. The program is improving and Leipold made necessary adjustments through the transfer portal to help the areas that remained bad a year ago.

The Jayhawks will not win a conference title, but there is an expectation to win at least a couple conference games, which hasn't been a reality for a long time.

Offense

Quarterback Jalon Daniels made the biggest difference for KU down the stretch with his ability to simply make plays as a runner and a thrower. With a full offseason under his belt, Daniels should continue to improve.

A talented backfield of Devin Neal (707 yards, eight touchdowns), as well as Minnesota transfer Ky Thomas (ran for 144 yards in the Guaranteed Rate Bowl vs. WVU) and Nebraska transfer Sevion Morrison, likely makes it the best unit on the team.

Wide receiver is a question mark with Trevor Wilson, Lawrence Arnold and Luke Grimm the likely contenders to start.

Along the offensive line, four starters return, but depth is a concern. Still, have veterans up front should help what is a talented offense that should continue its upward trend.

Defense

This will continue to be a work in progress for coordinator Brian Borland, but he wants to switch the scheme to try and create more opportunities for turnovers as a way to mask the talent deficiency at the moment.

Defensive tackle Sam Burt is back as a super senior and will be the unquestioned leader of the entire defense. He is joined by returners Caleb Sampson and Malcolm Lee up front along the line. Miami (Ohio) transfer Lonnie Phelps will be the speed threat at the other end spot.

At linebacker, there is far more depth than the Jayhawks have had in recent years. Gavin Potter and Rich Miller are back as returning starters on the outside, while Taiwan Berryhill leapt out after a strong spring at middle linebacker. Ohio State transfer Craig Young and UCF transfer Eriq Gilyard are key depth pieces.

Again, though, the secondary is a major concern. KU lost almost everyone except safety Kenny Logan Jr., though he may ironically be the best player on the defense.

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Specialists

Jacob Boreila will look to improve the place-kicking for the Jayhawks, as will Reis Vernon when it comes to punting. Both were near the bottom of the Big 12 a year ago.

Logan is not only a weapon on defense, but he can be a dynamic returner on special teams, as well.



AP photo

Kansas coach Lance Leipold

PLAYERS TO WATCH

QB Jalon Daniels, Jr. — Led KU to an upset of Texas and proved to be a dynamic play-maker to end last season.

S Kenny Logan, Jr. — A second-team All-Big 12 performer last year, Logan will need to step up on defense as a leader and performer.

RB Devin Neal, So. — Scored eight touchdowns and ran for 707 yards as a true freshman last season.



AP photo

Kansas quarterback Jalon Daniels



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16 Towson Tigers

2021: 4-7 (3-5 Colonial)



Towson quarterback Tyler Johnston

Kansas Athletics

BY SEAN MANNING

SManning@DominionPost.com

A quick glance at what Towson will bring back from last season will tell you the Tigers are going to go through quite a transition this year, needing to replace their starting quarterback, running back, leading receiver and top five tacklers on defense.

Coming off a 4-7 season a year ago, a fresh start may not necessarily be a bad thing. There are plenty of youth and transfers looking to make an impact, but as it stands prior to the start of the season, there are also plenty of unknowns that make the Tigers a wildcard.

Offense

Quarterback will be an interesting mix of relying on what you already had or using a transfer. Jeff Miller played sparingly for the Tigers before, throwing for 300 yards in his career, but UAB transfer Tyler Johnston has a very successful track record, throwing for 37 touchdowns and 4,837 yards in his career.

The same can be said in the backfield, with Devin Matthews returning after rushing for 271 yards and eight touchdowns last season for Towson. Maine transfer Curtis Murray missed all of last season but he should get carries, as well as Sabias Folley.

Pitt transfer Darian Street could avoid playing WVU this season, but he could be the top pass-catcher for the Tigers this season. He caught 24 passes for 336 yards at Pitt a year ago, but Jabari Allen will also be one the top targets after hauling in 29 catches for 263 yards and three touchdowns last season. Maryland transfer tight end Malik Jackson could be another threat.

Offensive line could be a problem, at least early. Towson lost three starters and will need to replace them with a lot of inexperience.

Defense

If the offense had a lot of questions marks, the Tigers defense may have even more so.

With only three returning starters across the board — one at each level — the rest of the defense will need to figure things out in a hurry.

Along the defensive line, senior Vinnie Shaffer will need to provide some stability after finishing with 2 1/2 sacks a year ago.

At linebacker, Ryan Kearney is back after finishing with 3 1/2 tackles for loss and two fumble recoveries.

In the secondary, cornerback Charles Peebles may be the best of the bunch, the leading returning tackler, which is only 30. He forced and recovered a fumble, as well, a year ago.

The rest of the defense will be filled out with newcomers, mainly freshman.

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Special teams

Keegan Vaughan made 50% of his field goals last season, just 4 of 8. He is back for his sophomore season. The Tigers will need to find a replacement for punter Shane McDonough, who averaged 40 yards per punt last season.

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Baltimore Sun photo

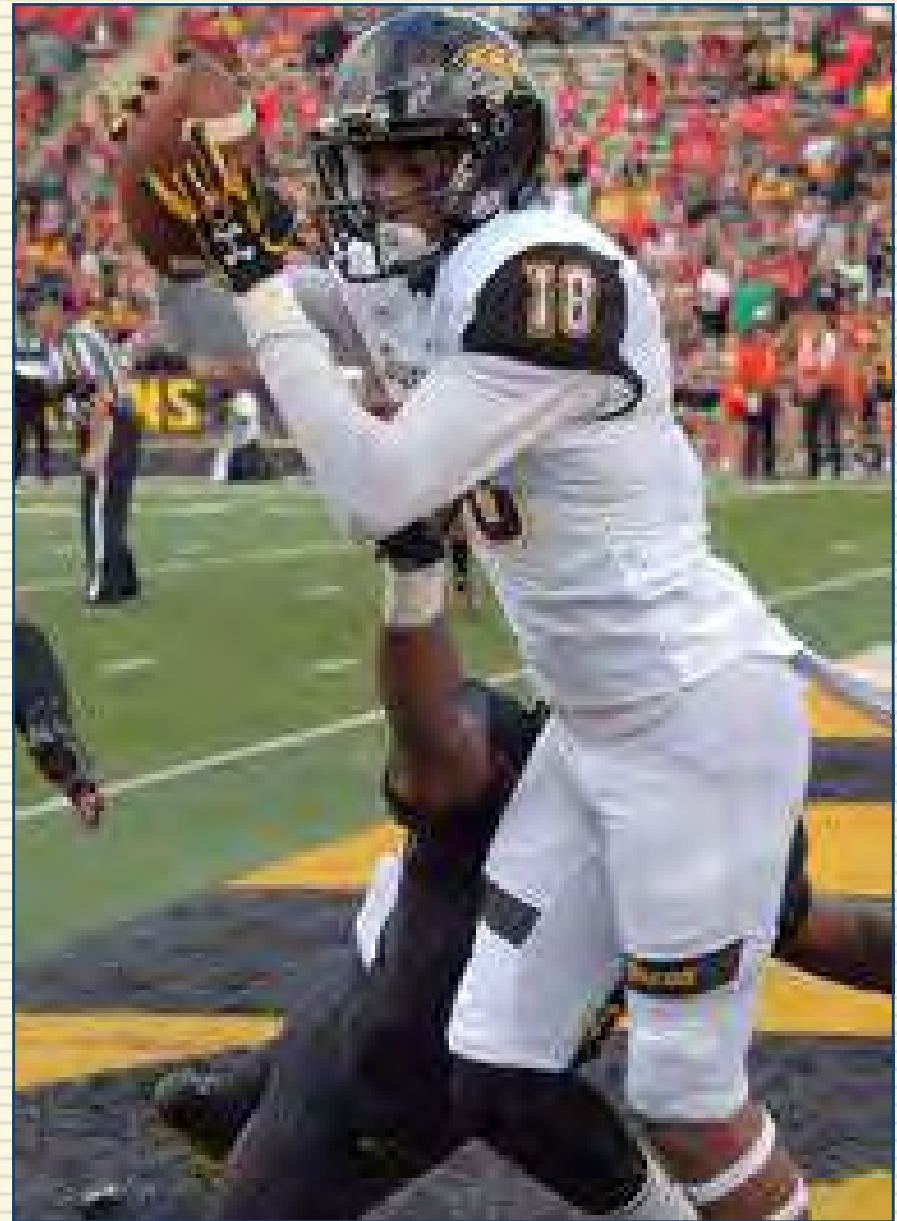
Towson coach Rob Ambrose

PLAYERS TO WATCH

QB Tyler Johnston, Sr. — The UAB transfer is definitely no stranger to winning, going 15-6 in his career with over 30 touchdown tosses.

CB Charles Peeples, Sr. — The team's top returning tackler, Peeples is an aggressive DB who the Tigers will rely on to be a leader of the team.

WR Darian Street, Sr. — A transfer from Pitt, Street adds experience after catching 24 passes for 336 yards and two touchdowns last season with the Panthers.



Baltimore Sun photo

Towson wide receiver Jabari Allen

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18 Coach bios

Matt Moore, offensive line

Birthday: Oct. 18
Hometown: Canton, Ga.
Education: Valdosta State, 1996 (bachelor's)
Playing Career: Valdosta State, 1991-94
Family: Wife, Kelly; children, Tanner, Reece, Sutton

Matt Moore is in his fourth year on the Mountaineer coaching staff, overseeing the offensive line and third year as the assistant head coach.

In 2021, the offensive line cleared the way for a 1,000-yard rusher in Leddie Brown for the second straight year. Center Zach Frazier earned All-America second team honors by the Walter Camp Football Foundation and the American Football Coaches Association, tackle Wyatt Milum was named to three different freshman All-America teams. Frazier earned All-Big 12 Conference second team honors by the league head coaches,



and guard Doug Nester was named to the All-Big 12 Conference Second Team by PFF College.

In 2020, despite having to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, West Virginia had one

of the most improved offenses in the nation in terms of total yards, showing gains of more than 60 yards rushing per game, almost 30 yards passing a game, more than 90 yards of total offense and almost seven more points a game.

His offensive line had a productive year with Brown rushing for 1,010 yards and nine touchdowns and four of Moore's offensive linemen earned postseason honors in 2020. Senior guard Mike Brown earned All-Big 12 Second Team honors, Chase Behrndt was an All-Big 12 Fourth Team selection by Phil Steele, Brandon Yates was an All-Big 12 Honorable Mention selection and Zach Frazier earned Freshman All-America honors.

Chad Scott, running backs

Birthday: June 11
Hometown: Plant City, Fla.
Education: North Carolina, 2004 (bachelor's)
Playing Career: Kentucky, 2000-01; North Carolina, 2002-04
Family: Wife, Shambrica; children, Kori, Jakobe

Chad Scott is in his fourth year on the Mountaineer coaching staff as the running backs coach. He served as the co-offensive coordinator for the first three years and was recently promoted to run game coordinator this past offseason.

In 2021, running back Leddie Brown finished with more than 1,000 yards rushing for the second straight season (1,065) and finished with a team-high 14 offensive touchdowns. He ranked No. 6 in the Big 12 Conference in rushing, No. 4 in total touchdowns and No. 11 in scoring.

In 2020, the Mountaineers had the



most improved offense in the country in terms of total yards. Their running game improved its production by more than 60 yards per game, more than 90 yards of total offense and almost seven points a game.

Brown had a productive year, rushing for 1,010 yards and nine touchdowns, earning All-Big 12 Conference First Team honors. Brown averaged 5.1 yards per carry and was ranked No. 14 nationally in rushing yards, No. 26 in touchdowns, No. 27 in rushing yards per game (101.0) and No. 31 in rushing touchdowns.

Scott worked with head coach Neal Brown during three different coaching tenures: Kentucky (RB/2013-14), Texas Tech (RB/2010-12) and Troy (RB/2007-09). He also was a teammate with Neal Brown at UK.

He came to Morgantown after serving as the tight ends and hybrids coach at North Carolina from 2016-18.



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20 Virginia Tech Hokies

2021: 6-7 (4-4 ACC)



Virginia Tech safety Chamarrí Conner

Virginia Tech Athletics

BY SEAN MANNING

SManning@DominionPost.com

It's a new era at Virginia Tech after the Hokies hired Penn State defensive coordinator Brent Pry to become their new head coach, looking to bring back the identity the program had under former coach Frank Beamer and assistant Bud Foster.

Out is Justin Fuente, who was an offensive-minded coach, after six seasons, but a complete change in philosophy may take the Hokies time to get back to what they once were after finishing three of the last four seasons under .500.

The problem could be depth in the trenches, but time will tell.

Offense

Quarterback was boom or bust for VT last season, but a familiar name will likely take the reins this season.

Former Marshall QB Grant Wells, who started the last two seasons for the Thundering Herd, is a George Washington High alum, but transferred to the Hokies this offseason. However, South Carolina transfer Jason Brown will not go quietly ahead of fall camp.

The running game will be the strength, despite losing lead back Raheem Blackshear. The trio of Keshawn King, Malachi Thomas and Jalen Holston.

The rest of the offense is a major question mark at both wide receiver and offensive line. In the receiver corps, Tre Turner and Tayvion Robinson are gone after combining, along with Blackshear, for 109 of VT's 173 total receptions from last season.

Kaleb Smith is back, and Da'Wain Lofton could be names to watch as far as pass-catchers go.

On the offensive line, the entire left side needs to be replaced, along with the center.

Defense

While Pry takes over the head coaching duties, the main defensive responsibilities will fall on first-time coordinator Chris Marve, who will inherit a group that will be hit or miss.

Up front is the biggest question as far as depth goes without much returning experience outside of tackle Norell Pollard and end TyJuan Garbutt. The Hokies will go back to a more traditional 4-3 look. They hope to improve the pass rush, which was 10th out of 14 in the ACC a year ago.

At linebacker, Alan Tisdale and Dax Hollifield are back after combining for 176 tackles a year ago.

The secondary is probably the strength of the whole team, led by safeties Chamarrí Conner and Nasir Peoples, as well as cornerback Dorian Strong. With a struggling pass rush, the secondary will be key, especially early on.

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Specialists

Punter Peter Moore is Virginia Tech's only returning All-ACC performer after averaging 44.5 yards per attempt last season. Kicker John Love, a freshman, will likely handle the place-kicking duties.

Robinson's departure at wide receiver also affects special teams as the Hokies will need to find another return to replace his production.



Virginia Tech Athletics

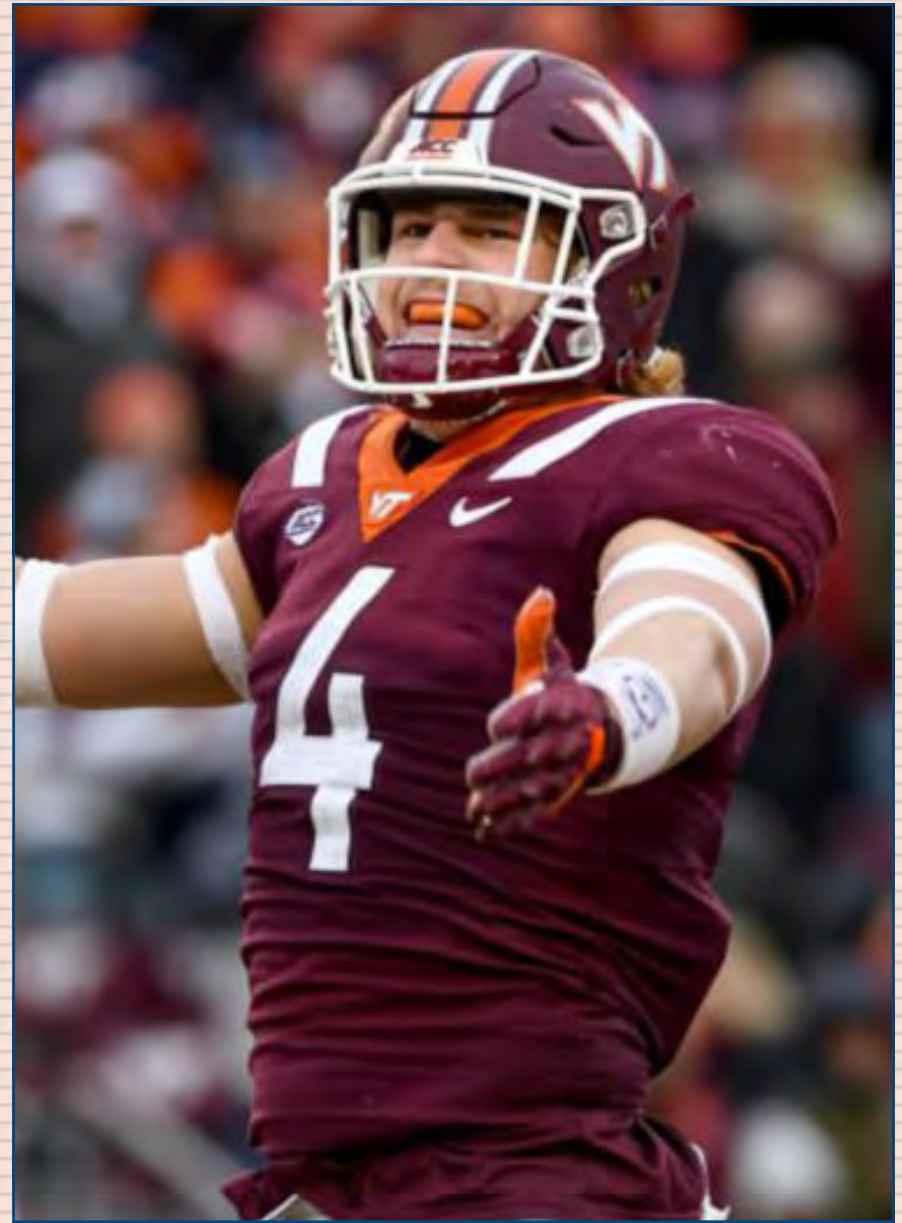
Virginia Tech coach Brent Pry

PLAYERS TO WATCH

QB Grant Wells, Jr. — After being an All-Conference USA performer, the former Marshall QB will be handed the keys of a Power Five program.

LB Dax Hollifield, Sr. — Expected to take an even greater leap under Brent Pry, Hollifield led the team with 92 tackles last year.

S Chamarri Conner, Sr. — The defensive backfield was a struggle last season but Conner adds stability to the back end with his speed and aggressiveness.



AP photo

Virginia Tech linebacker Dax Hollifield


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Texas Longhorns

2021: 5-7 (3-6 Big 12)



AP photo

Texas running back Bijan Robinson

BY JUSTIN JACKSON

JJackson@DominionPost.com

Steve Sarkasian's first year at Texas was a disappointing 5-7, which came after a 4-1 start.

Then the Longhorns held double-digit leads against Oklahoma, Oklahoma State and Baylor, but ended up losing all three games and was also upset in overtime against Kansas.

It's highly unlikely Sarkasian's second season will be as up and down, even though Texas only returns five starters on offense and four on defense.

Upgrades were made in the offseason, including bringing in Ohio State transfer Quinn Ewers — the nation's top recruit in the 2021 class — at quarterback, as well as bringing in former TCU head coach Gary Patterson as a special assistant.

The 2022 schedule includes a home game against Alabama on Sept. 10, so just how much Texas has improved will be known early on.

Offense

Bringing in Ewers made sense, because Casey Thompson transferred to Nebraska after leading the Big 12 with 24 touchdown passes.

Ewers will have junior Bijan Robinson to hand the ball to. Robinson is a first-team all-Big 12 player and is projected to be a first-round pick in the 2023 NFL Draft.

He rushed for 1,127 yards and 11 touchdowns last season, while averaging 5.8 yards per carry.

Xavier Worthy is the top target at receiver: he set a school freshman record with 12 touchdown catches last season, while gaining 981 yards.

Wyoming transfer Isaiah Neyor, who also caught 12 TD passes with the Cowboys last season, will also help stretch defenses.

The offensive line returns guard Junior Angilau and center Jake Majors, and tight end Jahleel Billingsley is a transfer from Alabama.

Sarkasian went heavy on offensive lineman in his 2022 recruiting class, and 5-star prospects Devon Campbell and Kelvin Banks Jr. will also push for playing time.

Defense

Texas was 100th in the country last season, allowing 425.6 yards per game, so any improvement the Longhorns have this season will begin there.

Keondre Coburn will anchor the defensive line at nose tackle, where he had 15 tackles and a sack last season.

Jaylan Ford was third on the team with 53 tackles, even though he started just two games. He and linebacker DeMarvion Overshown will have to come up big to keep pressure on opposing offenses. Overshown is an all-Big 12 preseason pick.

D'Shawn Jamison had 48 tackles and an interception at one cornerback

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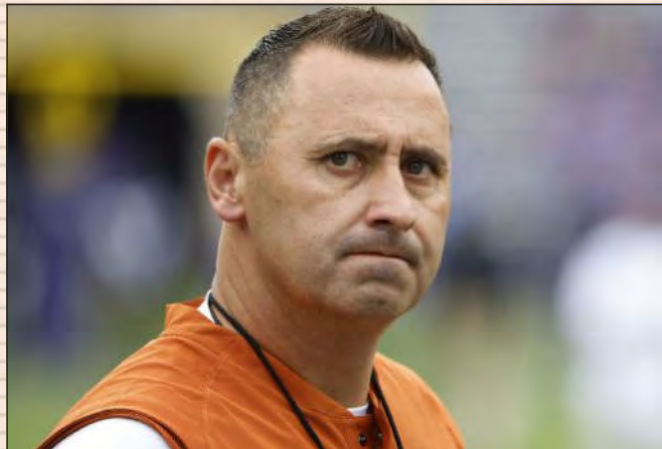
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spot last season, and he'll be joined by Ohio State transfer Ryan Watts in what could be an opposing duo.

Anthony Cook returns at safety after recording 47 tackles last season and he'll be joined by Jerrin Thompson, who started five games last season.

Specialists

Cameron Dicker is gone, meaning there is a big hole in the Texas kicking game. Australian native Isaac Pearson is expected to be the punter.



AP photo

Texas coach Steve Sarkisian

PLAYERS TO WATCH

RB Bijan Robinson, Jr. — Named the Big 12's preseason offensive player of the year after rushing for 1,127 yards and 11 touchdowns last season. Has rushed for 1,830 yards and 15 scores over his first two years.

WR Xavier Worthy, Soph. — Had 62 catches for 981 yards and 12 touchdowns last season, including nine catches for 261 yards and two scores against Oklahoma.

QB Quinn Ewers, Fr. — The former No. 1 recruit in the 2021 class is a transfer from Ohio State, but is still looking to throw his first collegiate pass. Led Southlake Carroll (Texas) to the Class 6A state title in 2020.



Texas Athletics

Texas wide receiver Xavier Worthy

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Baylor Bears

2021: 12-2 (7-2 Big 12)



AP photo

Baylor quarterback Blake Shapen

BY JUSTIN JACKSON

JJackson@DominionPost.com

Dave Aranda's second season as head coach of Baylor was something of a dream, one that included a Big 12 title, 12 wins and a Sugar Bowl championship.

What do Aranda and the Bears do for an encore?

For starters, Baylor was picked as the preseason favorite in the Big 12 and had three offensive players and two defensive players earn all-Big 12 preseason honors.

So, expectations are high, but there are questions, beginning at quarterback and running back.

The defense returns seven starters and it was a defense in 2021 that ranked in the top 31 nationally in scoring, rushing yards allowed and total yards allowed.

Baylor's success on offense last season was based on a balanced rushing and passing attack, with the Bears ranking No. 10 in the country in rushing.

Coming up with those types of numbers again means having some new faces fill some pretty big shoes.

Offense

It begins at quarterback, where sophomore Blake Shapen beat out incumbent starter Gerry Bohanon, who ended up in the transfer portal and wound up at USF.

Shapen played in five games last season and completed 72% of his throws. He had five touchdowns and no interceptions.

He made his mark filling in for Bohanon in the Big 12 title game against Oklahoma State, when he completed his first 17 attempts and finished 23 of 28 for 180 yards and three TDs.

He also threw for 254 yards and two touchdowns in a win against Texas Tech.

Shapen will need to develop into a polished player quickly, because the Bears are hurting for depth at receiver and running back.

The leading returning rusher is junior Taye McWilliams, but he finished with just 181 yards last season.

The leading returning receiver is tight end Ben Sims, who caught 31 passes for 361 yards and six scores.

The good news is Baylor does return an experienced line up front, with tackle Connor Galvin and center Jacob Gall earning all-Big 12 preseason honors, as did Sims at tight end.

Baylor also returns Grant Miller and Gavin Byers at the guard positions.

Defense

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Middle linebacker Dillon Doyle will anchor the Bears on defense after finishing second on the team with 83 tackles last season.

Up front, Baylor returns its entire starting line, including nose tackle Siaki Ika, another all-Big 12 preseason selection. Ika finished with 19 tackles and four sacks in 2021.

He'll be joined up front by defensive ends Cole Maxwell and Gabe Hall, and Hall led the Bears with six sacks last season.

The secondary needs to plus in some new faces, but does return free safety Christian Morgan, who had 29 tackles and broke up six passes last season.

Another name to keep an eye on is linebacker Josh White, a former 4-star recruit who transferred in from LSU.

Specialists

Isaiah Hankins returns at kicker after going 14 of 20 on field-goal attempts last season, while Issac Power returns at punter. Power averaged 45 yards per punt last season and had 19 punts of over 50 yards.

Finding a replacement for Trestan Ebner is the only hole here. Ebner had a combined 638 yards in kickoff and punt returns and had a 98-yard kickoff return for a touchdown last season.



AP photo

Baylor coach Dave Aranda



Baylor Athletics

Baylor linebacker Dillon Doyle

PLAYERS TO WATCH

QB Blake Shapen, Soph. — Made his case to be the starter this year by stepping in last season in the Big 12 title game against Oklahoma State and completed his first 17 attempts. He finished 23 of 28 for 180 yards and three TDs.

LB Dillon Doyle, Sr. — Has started every game the last two seasons since transferring from Iowa and has 145 tackles in that time. He also doubles as the Bears' fullback in goal line situations.

DL Siaki Ika, Jr. — Was named all-Big 12 first team last season after transferring in from LSU. Finished with 19 tackles, six tackles for loss and four quarterback sacks.



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26

Texas Tech Red Raiders

2021: 7-6 (3-6 Big 12)



Texas Tech running back SaRodorick Thompson

AP photo

BY JUSTIN JACKSON

JJackson@DominionPost.com

Former Baylor assistant Joey McGuire embarks on his first season as a head coach, taking over a Texas Tech program that won seven games, including a victory against Mississippi State in the Liberty Bowl.

He's hired Oregon assistant Tim DeRuyter as the defensive coordinator and brought back Zach Kittley as offensive coordinator.

Kittley was in Lubbock, Texas under Kliff Kingsbury and has since coached at Houston Baptist and Western Kentucky.

Expectations are down in 2022, with Texas Tech returning just four starters on offense and seven on defense. No Red Raider landed on the all-Big 12 preseason team.

Leading receiver Erik Ezukanma left school early for the NFL Draft and the Red Raiders have work to do defensively after allowing 405 total yards per game last season, which ranked 86th in the nation.

Offense

Donovan Smith and Tyler Shough are competing at quarterback, with Smith starting four games last season and throwing for 1,181 yards and seven touchdowns.

Meanwhile, Shough is coming off a broken collarbone that kept him out of action last season.

He's a former Oregon transfer who was expected to be the starter last season.

Without Ezukanma, the receiving corps is young, which opens the door for SaRodorick Thompson to lead the offense at running back.

Thompson was plagued with injuries last season, but did rush for 500 yards and 10 touchdowns when healthy. Tahj Brooks added 568 yards and seven TDs on the ground, and he also returns.

The offensive line is looking to replace three starters, but Texas Tech was able to bring in transfer lineman Cole Spencer, Michael Shanahan and Cade Briggs to help fill those holes.

Defense

Texas Tech returns the bulk of its starters in the secondary and has some potential up front with senior defensive lineman Tyree Wilson, who finished with 38 tackles and seven sacks last season.

McGuire's first recruiting class focused heavily on defense and building and depth, which could help down the road.

For now, the strength is in the secondary, where Marquis Waters and Dadrion Taylor-Demerson both return at safety.

Rayshad Williams returns at corner, and Malik Dunlap also returns in the secondary after battling injuries last season. He was a transfer from North Carolina State.

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Krishom Merriweather returns at linebacker and is likely to move to the middle after the departures of Riko Jeffers and Colin Schooler.

Specialists

The biggest hole is replacing kicker Jonathan Garibay, who was 15 of 16 on field-goal attempts last season, including a 62-yarder against Iowa State.

Austin McNamara returns at punter. He averaged 48.2 yards per punt last season. He had 20 go for 50 or more yards. Of his 42 punts, 17 were put inside the 20-yard line.



AP photo

Texas Tech coach Joey McGuire

PLAYERS TO WATCH

RB SaRodorick Thompson, Sr. — Entered last season coming off shoulder surgery and dealt with shoulder problems for much of the season, but still rushed for 500 yards and 10 TDs, while averaging 4.7 yards per carry.

DE Tyree Wilson, Sr. — Will also stand up in some cases and play linebacker. Had 13.5 tackles for loss last season, including seven quarterback sacks.

RB Tahj Brooks, Jr. — The Red Raiders look to have a strong running game and Brooks is a home-run hitter. He had four carries that went for 40 or more yards last season and finished averaging 6.5 yards per carry.



Texas Tech Athletics

Texas Tech running back Tahj Brooks

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28 TCU Horned Frogs

2021: 5-7 (3-6 Big 12)



AP photo

TCU quarterback Max Duggan

BY JUSTIN JACKSON

JJackson@DominionPost.com

TCU fired its most successful coach Gary Patterson following a 5-7 season in 2021, and then lost one of its highest-ranked recruits in running back Zach Evans, who transferred to Ole Miss.

Sonny Dykes now takes over the program looking to move on from the legend that was Patterson, while rebuilding a defense that was 119th in the country in yards allowed.

And he starts with a competition at quarterback, too.

TCU does return seven starters on offense and defense, with the offense ranking No. 36 in the nation in total yards at 435.8 per game.

But, the Horned Frogs have had two losing seasons in the past three years and haven't been to a bowl game since 2018.

Dykes certainly has some work to do in his first season.

Offense

Max Duggan has 29 starts under his belt and threw for 2,048 yards and 16 touchdowns last season, while rushing for 352 yards and three scores.

His competition comes from Chandler Morris, a former Oklahoma transfer, who accounted for 531 yards and three TDs in a start against Baylor last season.

Morris ended up playing in four games last season and threw for 717 yards and completed 66% of his passes.

Kendre Miller rushed for 623 yards and seven touchdowns, while averaging 7.5 yards per carry, so he'll be looked to fill Evans' shoes.

Quentin Johnson was an all-Big 12 preseason pick after catching 33 passes for 634 yards and six scores. He averaged 19.2 yards per catch and he'll be joined by Taye Barber, who has 122 career receptions.

The offensive line returns all-Big 12 performer Steve Avila at center and Andrew Coker returns at right tackle.

SMU transfer Alan Ali also joins the mix. He was a four-year starter for the Mustangs.

Defense

New defensive coordinator Joe Gillespie is installing a 3-3-5 scheme at TCU and will have two senior defensive ends to build around in Dylan Horton and Terrell Cooper.

Leading tackler Dee Winters (74 tackles, two interceptions) returns at middle linebacker and he'll line up next to Jamoi Hodge, who added 60 tackles.

TCU only had 15 quarterback sacks last season, so that will be an area that needs to be improved.

Tre'Vius Hodges-Tomlinson was an all-Big 12 preseason pick at cornerback after picking off two passes and adding 43 tackles last season, and he



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will anchor the Horned Frogs secondary.

Nook Bradford returns at safety and C.J. Cesar also adds experience to the secondary.

Colorado transfer Mark Perry will also add depth at safety.

Specialists

Griffin Kell will be in his fourth season as a starter and he was 14 of 18 on field goals last season and a perfect 42 of 42 on extra points.

Jordy Sandy averaged 43.3 yards per punt and Derius Davis had 473 kick return yards last season to go along with his 518 receiving yards.



TCU Athletics

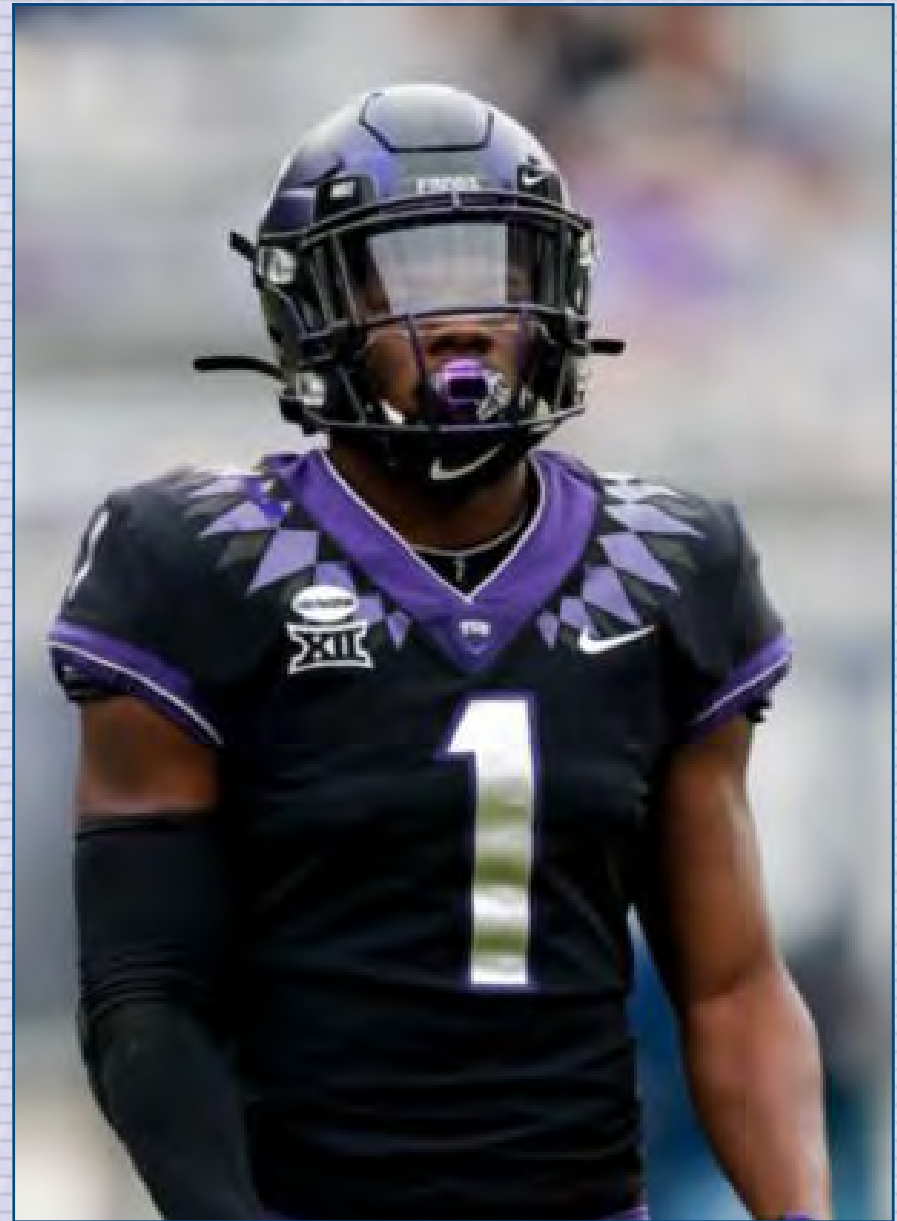
TCU coach Sonny Dykes

PLAYERS TO WATCH

QB Max Duggan, Sr. — The dual threat QB has thrown for 5,920 yards and rushed for 1,433 over three seasons, but has yet to lead the Horned Frogs to a bowl victory.

DB Tre'Vius Hodges-Tomlinson, Sr. — An all-Big 12 first-team selection last season after recording 43 tackles and two interceptions. He also broke up seven passes and forced two fumbles.

RB Kendre Miller, Jr. — Averaged 7.5 yards per carry last season and finished with seven touchdowns. Had 185 yards and three scores on just 12 attempts against Texas Tech.



AP photo

TCU cornerback Tre'Vius Hodges-Tomlinson

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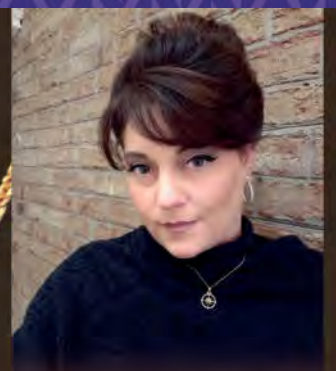
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30 Iowa State Cyclones

2021: 7-6 (5-4 Big 12)



Iowa State wide receiver Xavier Hutchinson

AP photo

BY MATTHEW PEASLEE
Sports@DominionPost.com

Following a disappointing 2021 campaign, Iowa State is in for a rebuilding year in 2022. The Cyclones are still coming off five-straight winning seasons after finishing 7-6 despite a loss to Clemson in the Cheez-It Bowl, but expectations were never higher in Ames than last season.

ISU earned three-straight wins in the heart of their schedule a year ago, including a signature victory over then-No. 8 Oklahoma State on the road, but sputtered toward the end of the regular season. Turnovers hurt ISU, especially in a loss to archrival Iowa, but five of the Cyclones six losses were by a touchdown or less. This year's team will have to make up for the loss of a number of star players, but the increased competition may fuel a winning spirit to get the Cyclones back on track to where they expect to be — competing for a Big 12 Championship.

Offense

The ISU offense must find a replace for standout running back Breece Hall, who was drafted by the New York Jets. The likely starter will be junior Jirehl Brock, though he is inexperienced with just 174 yards last season.

Another big loss is tight end Charlie Kolar, who now plays for the Baltimore Ravens. Kolar was a unique twist to their passing game and losing that target will hurt the overall scheme of the offense, especially when a new quarterback will be thrown into the mix.

The Cyclones will have competition at QB as Hunter Dekkers may emerge above Nate Glantz and Blake Clark as the replacement for Brock Purdy — now with the San Francisco 49ers. Xavier Hutchinson was a first-team All-Big 12 selection at wide receiver and will be the top deep option for the QBs.

Defense

Ranked as the No. 9 overall defense in the country and the top passing defense in the Big 12, the Cyclones won't be as strong as they were last year. Will McDonald returns as a great pass rusher and Blake Peterson will step in alongside him on the line for his first taste of starting action.

The linebackers may be the strongest unit with a mix of Gerry Vaughn and O'Rien Vance who combined for 92 tackles last season. The secondary lost two starters to the transfer portal but Anthony Johnson returns for his senior season as one of the most consistent players on the team, starting the last 41 games for the Cyclones.



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Specialists

Field-goal kicking has also been a consistent for Iowa State, converting 22 of 24 a year ago. While the kicking and punting duties will be split between a number of players, the Cyclones recently hired a senior special teams analyst in John Bonamego, formerly the head coach at Central Michigan who also has NFL experience. Jaylin Noel will be the one returning both punts and kicks. He averaged 6.1 yards per return on punts and 26.0 yards per return on kickoffs.



William Wotring/The Dominion Post

Iowa State coach Matt Campbell

PLAYERS TO WATCH

WR Xavier Hutchinson, Sr. — He was a top target a year ago and will grow his presence in the offense, especially after Tarique Milton transferred to Texas. Hutchinson still led the Big 12 in catches last year with 83 which was also an Iowa State record.

RB Jirehl Brock, Jr. — Brock is a dual threat as the running back and kick returner. He will be getting his first true starts this season but looks to build upon his last game when he carried 14 times against Clemson in the Cheez It Bowl.

QB Hunter Dekkers, Soph. — A well-rounded athlete, Dekkers can run and throw with the best of them in the Big 12. He was the back up to Brock Purdy last year and should not miss a beat in the starting role after completing 20 of 36 passes a year ago.



Iowa State Athletics

Iowa State running back Jirehl Brock

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Oklahoma Sooners

2021: 11-2 (7-2 Big 12)



Oklahoma wide receiver Marvin Mims

Oklahoma Athletics

BY MATTHEW PEASLEE

Sports@DominionPost.com

The Oklahoma Sooners made headlines in the college football offseason, not so much for what they have but rather for what they lost. In a move that shook the sport to its core, Lincoln Riley left the head coaching post he held for five seasons. Riley, 38, departed OU for USC and a reported \$110 million contract.

Along with the coaching staff, the Sooners also lost 14 starters from last year's team — eight transferred out — that went 10-2, finished third in the Big 12, and won the Alamo Bowl. Riley posted double-digit wins in all but one of his seasons at Oklahoma (he won 9 in the unconventional 2020 season).

Brent Venables, a former defensive coordinator for the Sooners and most recently Clemson, was named the 23rd head coach of OU heading into the 2022 season. The Sooners were in a lot of heart-wrenching games a year ago, going 6-1 in games decided by 7 or fewer points.

Offense

Along with the coaching transition, the Sooners are also dealing with a different look in their quarterback room. Two OU QBs transferred out — Spencer Rattler and Caleb Williams — and two transferred in — Dillon Gabriel from UCF and Davis Beville from Pitt. Gabriel will likely get the starting job after posting 8,037 yards and 70 touchdowns in two seasons at UCF.

His top targets will be Marvin Mims, who led the team with 705 yards on 32 receptions, and Drake Stoops, son of former head coach and all-time wins leader Bob Stoops. The running game is inexperienced with Eric Gray stepping into a starting role after serving as a backup last year. Three offensive linemen return and will be boosted by Cal transfer McKade Mettauer who secured the Bears as a Pac-12 team not prone to turnovers in 2021. It was a coup for Venables to keep offensive line coach Bill Bedenbough away from USC.

Defense

At Clemson, Venables' defense was No. 2 in scoring behind only national champion Georgia in 2021. The same defense-first mentality will be on display at Oklahoma, especially because Venables is bringing former Tigers assistant Tim Roof over as his defensive coordinator.

Linebacker DaShaun White is the top returner after finishing with 66 tackles last season. Woodi Washington and Justin Broiles each had two interceptions in the secondary in 2021.



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Specialists

Zach Schmit steps in to handle the field goal kicking duties following the graduation of Gabe Brkic, who was 76 on attempts last year with a long of 57 yards. Michael Turk is the returning punter who averaged 51.2 yards per boot. The speedy Mims looks to be the top return man for the Sooners.



AP photo

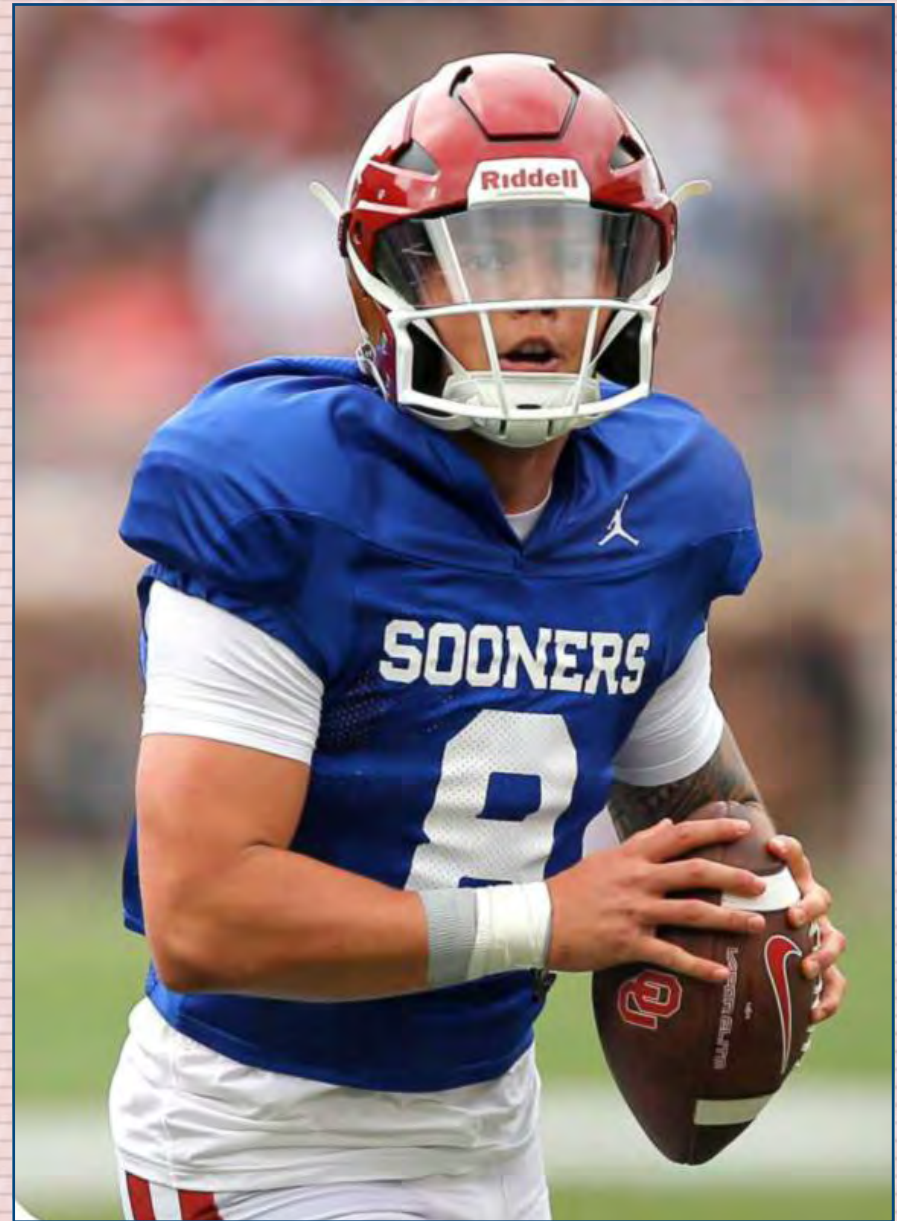
Oklahoma coach Brent Venables

PLAYERS TO WATCH

WR Marvin Mims, Jr. — The opportunity is now for Mims to become the focal point of the OU offense. He caught 32 passes for 705 yards last year and can easily double that number this year. Also, look for him to reach double digits in TD receptions after hauling in five in 2021.

QB Dillon Gabriel, Jr. — A true air-raid QB, Gabriel helped lead the success of UCF in recent years and he will fit right in with the Big 12. Before transferring, Gabriel threw for over 90 touchdowns and 8,000 yards in his first two years of college ball.

DT Jeffery Johnson, Sr. — Another transfer, Johnson came over from Tulane and he, too, is ready for big-time football. New OU head coach Brent Venables is a defense-first coach and Johnson fits well into his run-stopping scheme. He had 44 total tackles a year ago.



Oklahoma Athletics

Oklahoma quarterback Dillon Gabriel

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34 Coach bios

Tony Washington, wide receivers

Birthday: Oct. 18

Hometown: High Point, N.C.

Education: Appalachian State, 2013 (bachelor's)

Playing Career: Appalachian State, 2009-13

Family: Wife, Tiffany; children, TJ, Langston

Tony Washington joined the Mountaineers coaching staff as the wide receivers coach in February 2022.

Washington came to WVU after serving as the wide receivers coach at Coastal Carolina in 2019-20. During that time, the Chanticleers were one of the most successful programs in the nation, posting a 22-3 record and 14-2 mark in the Sun Belt Conference while spending most of that time in the national polls.

In 2021, the Chanticleers' offense was one of the most explosive units in the nation, ranking among the top FBS teams in a variety of categories.



Coastal Carolina finished with 11 wins, won the school's first bowl game and spent time in the national top 20 for most of the season, finishing as one of the top teams just outside the top 25.

CCU was the most efficient team in the nation and produced the best third-down conversion percentage and was No. 5 in total offense and scoring offense, No. 6 in rushing offense and fewest interceptions thrown, No. 23 in red zone offense, No. 25 in first down offense and No. 28 in passing offense.

Washington's receivers were a vital part of the offense, as Jaivon Heiligh led the squad with 66 catches for 1,128 yards and seven touchdowns, earning honorable mention All-American honors and All-Sun Belt Conference honors for the second straight year. Kameron Brown also was named All-Sun Belt Conference honorable-mention.

Sean Reagan, tight ends

Birthday: Dec. 27

Hometown: Conyers, Ga.

Education: North Georgia, 2008 (bachelor's)

Family: Wife, Elizabeth; children, Heidi, Chloe, Maggie



yards passing a game, more than 90 yards of total offense and scoring almost seven more points a game.

Doege threw for more than 2,500 yards and 14 touchdowns. He ranked No. 10 nation-

ally in completions per game (23.9), No. 16 in passing yards (2,587), No. 23 in passing yards per game (258.7) and No. 37 in completion percentage (.639). He finished with four 300-yard passing games, had multiple passing touchdowns four times and had 30 or more completions three times.

In 2021, WVU was fourth in the Big 12 in passing yards, amassing more than 3,200 yards through the air. Mountaineer quarterback Jarrett Doege was second in the league in passing yards, being one of only two passers with more than 3,000 yards, and was fourth in total offense.

In 2020, despite having to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, West Virginia had one of the most improved offenses in the nation in terms of total yards, showing gains of more than 60 yards rushing per game, almost 30

In 2019, quarterback Austin Kendall averaged 20.8 completions per game, ranking No. 4 in the Big 12 and No. 25 nationally, and Doege led WVU to wins in two of its final three games of the season.

Reagan came to West Virginia in 2019 after serving as an assistant coach at Troy from 2008-18, including the last four years as a member of Brown's staff.



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Coach bios

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Jeff Koonz, linebackers/special teams**Birthday:** May 30**Hometown:** Wallkill, N.Y.**Education:** Auburn, 2004 (bachelor's); Texas, 2006 (master's)**Family:** Wife, Maura; children, Mary, Jameson, MacKenzie

the Big 12 Conference and No. 36 nationally in punting, and Winston Wright Jr. was No. 19 nationally in kickoff return average per game. Wright was named an All-Big 12 Conference First

Team selection by PFF College.

WVU's defense finished No. 5 nationally in red zone defense, an improvement of 67 spots from the year before, was No. 18 in fewest defensive first downs allowed and in fourth-down percentage, No. 29 in third-down defense (.347), No. 37 in total defense (350.1) and No. 39 in tackles for loss (6.5), an improvement of nine spots from the 2020 season.

The WVU defense had an outstanding year in 2020, leading the nation in pass defense and ranking No. 4 in in total defense (291.4), No. 21 in scoring defense (20.5), No. 23 in interceptions (11), No. 24 in pass efficiency defense (121.52) and No. 28 in rushing defense (131.8).

Jeff Koonz is in his third year on the Mountaineer coaching staff as the special teams coordinator and the inside linebackers coach.

In 2021, kicker Casey Legg was a semifinalist for the Lou Groza Award, signifying the top kicker in college football. He hit 19-of-23 field goals and all 35 extra points and led WVU in scoring (92). He was first in the Big 12 Conference and No. 18 nationally in field goals made per game (1.6), No. 4 in the league and No. 26 nationally in field goal percentage, No. 3 in the conference in total field goals made (19) and No. 6 in scoring (7.7).

Punter Tyler Sumpter was No. 2 in

Dontae Wright, safeties**Birthday:** May 26**Hometown:** Louisa, Ky.**Education:** Miami (Ohio), 2007 (bachelor's); Kentucky, 2009 (master's)**Playing Career:** Miami (Ohio), 2003-06

was tied for No. 2 in the Big 12 Conference in interceptions and was No. 3 in passing defense, giving up only 211.2 yards game through the air. WVU was No. 5 in the nation in red zone defense

and No. 18 in fewest first downs allowed.

Dontae Wright is in his third year on the Mountaineer coaching staff as the safeties coach. He came to Morgantown after serving as the safeties coach at Western Michigan for two seasons.

WVU finished No. 5 nationally in red zone defense, an improvement of 67 spots from the year before, was No. 18 in fewest defensive first downs allowed and in fourth-down percentage, No. 29 in third-down defense (.347), No. 37 in total defense (350.1) and No. 39 in tackles for loss (6.5), an improvement of nine spots from the 2020 season.

In 2021 conference games, WVU

Safety Sean Mahone made his mark on and off the field. He was named a finalist for the National Football Foundation's Campbell Trophy, also known as the academic Heisman and was a member of the Scholar-Athlete team, one of college football's most prestigious academic teams. The school record-holder for the most games played in a WVU career (53), he was WVU's second-leading tackler with 81 stops and tied for the team lead in interceptions (2). He was an All-Big 12 Third-Team selection by Phil Steele.



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36 Kansas State Wildcats

2021: 8-5 (4-5 Big 12)



Kansas State running back Deuce Vaughn

AP photo

BY MATTHEW PEASLEE

Sports@DominionPost.com

Riding high after a big win over LSU in the Texas Bowl, Kansas State is an intriguing team that looks to rise up from the middle of the road in the Big 12.

Chris Klieman enters his fourth season as head coach and the Wildcats went 8-5 a year ago. It will be a bit of a different look for KSU from a year ago, though, as they lost 30 seniors to graduation and several others transferring out. The Wildcats were active and successful in the transfer portal, though, as all incoming players from the portal arrive from Power Five schools. KSU certainly has experienced depth at most positions on all sides of the ball.

Klieman said at Big 12 media days that speed will be the name of the game and this team has gotten faster.

This could be a team to watch in a wide open Big 12 this season as Klieman's program is certainly headed in the right direction.

Offense

Star running back Deuce Vaughn is a main source of that speed and he is gaining attention from all corners of the country.

Vaughn was named KSU's 11th consensus All-American and he looks to build upon last year's campaign where he ran for 1,404 yards and 18 touchdowns with a long run of 80 yards.

He's a dynamo at receiver, too, catching 49 passes for 468 yards and two touchdowns. He's on the Doak Walker and Maxwell Award watch lists and will be accompanied by a stable of other offensive weapons including returning starters at receiver like Malik Knowles and Phillip Brooks.

A surprise departure for the Wildcats was sixth-year WR Chabastin Taylor who left the team before spring practice. At quarterback, KSU brings in Adrian Martinez who spent the last four years at Nebraska. With the Cornhuskers, Martinez amassed nearly 8,500 yards over four years with 45 touchdowns.

Defense

Just like on offense, the Wildcats have a shining star on defense too. Defensive end Felix Anudike-Uzomah led the nation in forced fumbles and had 11 total sacks, with six coming in one game against TCU.

Khalid Dukes joins him on the line and the pair of juniors are prepared to be in opposing backfields all season long. Julius Brents and Ekow Boye-Doe are returning starters in a secondary that lost a lot due to graduation.

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Specialists

The Wildcats have a pair of talented punters including Ty Zenter and Jack Blumer who can both average over 40 yards per punt. Chris Tennant will handle the field goal kicking duties. On returns, Knowles and Brooks will add speed as both have returned kicks for touchdowns in their careers.



AP photo

Kansas State coach Chris Klieman

PLAYERS TO WATCH

RB Deuce Vaughn, Jr. — Heralded as one of the top running backs in the country, Vaughn is a big-time playmaker with great speed and quick reflexes. He rushed for more than 2,000 yards with 25 touchdowns in his two-year career.

OT Cooper Beebe, Jr. — A third-year starter, he was also first team All Big 12 on the offensive line last year. Beebe is a force to be reckoned with standing at 6-foot-7, weighing 322 pounds.

QB Adrian Martinez, Sr. — Coming off a solid four-year career at Nebraska, Martinez is excited for his next chapter at another school in a competitive conference. He racked up more than 8,000 passing yards with 45 touchdowns and added another 2,000-some yards on the ground.



Kansas State Athletics

Kansas State offensive tackle Cooper Beebe



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Oklahoma State Cowboys

2021: 12-2 (8-1 Big 12)



AP photo

Oklahoma State quarterback Spencer Sanders

BY MATTHEW PEASLEE

Sports@DominionPost.com

Oklahoma State is coming off one of its best seasons in school history. For just the second time, the Cowboys reached the 12-win plateau.

They eclipsed double-digit wins for the seventh time in the last 12 years and knocked off Notre Dame, 37-35, in the Fiesta Bowl to finish No. 7 in the final rankings. Head coach Mike Gundy has truly built this program into one of the most underrated in the country.

He is the nation's second-longest tenured head coach at the FBS level and his 91 wins since taking over OSU in 2005 are fourth in Big 12 history behind only Bob Stoops, Mack Brown and Bill Snyder. In 16 years, the Cowboys have not had a losing season and that will most likely remain the same in 2022 as they look to compete for that elusive Big 12 Championship title.

Offense

Spencer Sanders returns at quarterback as one of the best in the Big 12. He earned first-team All-Big 12 honors a year ago throwing for 2,839 yards and 20 touchdowns. He tripped up in the Big 12 title game throwing four interceptions against Baylor, but redeem himself with a strong showing in the Fiesta Bowl victory, and returns as one of the only experienced QBs in the conference.

He threw 12 picks on the year but added nearly 700 yards on the ground. He has a whole host of big-play targets as seven receivers come back, led by Brennan Presley who caught 50 passes for 619 yards and five touchdowns. The carries at running back will be split between Dominic Richardson and Jaden Nixon, who combined for just 426 yards on 90 carries in limited time.

The offense will be bolstered by three returning starters, but must replace former Mountaineer Josh Sills, who signed a free agent deal with the Philadelphia Eagles.

Defense

As strong as the OSU offense has been in recent years, the defense has been among the most dominant in the nation. The Cowboys were No. 1 in the country in sacks, No. 2 in tackles for loss and were No. 1 in the Big 12 in total defense and scoring defense.

Collin Oliver led the team with 105 sacks, as Tyler Lacy, Brock Martin, Sione Asi and Brendon Evers also provide an intimidating presence. Trace Ford returns to the rotation as a top pass rusher after missing all of 2021 with a knee injury.

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Specialists

Australia-born punter Tom Hutton averaged 42.4 yards per punt last season and kicker Alex Hale will be seeing more time but has converted 16 of 20 field goals in his career. The special teams defense is among the best in the country, only allowing 0.8 yards per punt return. The speedy Presley will handle the bulk of the return duties.



AP photo

Oklahoma State coach Mike Gundy

PLAYERS TO WATCH

QB Spencer Sanders, Sr. — Sanders is a preseason first-team All-Big 12 selection after making the first team last year, too. He threw for 2,839 yards and ran for 668 yards with a tally of 26 total touchdowns. Sanders may be one of the top dual threats in the country.

DE Collin Oliver, Soph. — Coming off a sparkling true freshman season, Oliver has grown into a top tackler in the conference. He had 11 1.2 sacks last season, which was seventh-bets in the country and added 15 tackles for a loss — 29 total.

DE Brock Martin, Sr. — Another defensive stalwart is Martin, who had 103 total tackles, 11 1/2 sacks, 26 1/2 tackles for a loss and five fumble recoveries. He was a first-team All-Big 12 selection.



AP photo

Oklahoma State defensive end Brock Martin

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