

# NAMES TO KNOW-CUSA

## Marshall Thundering Herd

**Top Play:** QB Grant Wells

**Potential Bust:** RB Sheldon Evans

**Sleeper:** RB Rasheen Ali

**Impact Transfer:** WR Jayden Harrison

**Dynasty Prospect:** RB Rasheen Ali

**Fantastic Freshman:** WR Caleb Crooms



All indications to this point are that Marshall will at least begin the season with a committee approach under new head coach Charles Huff. Is that what this coaching staff prefers? Huff retained offensive coordinator Tim Cramsey who has evidence of utilizing both a workhorse and a committee over the years, and this could be a scenario in which multiple backs are potentially used. **Sheldon Evans**, the primary backup the last two seasons, should get the first crack at the job. Redshirt freshman **Rasheen Ali** got the start in the spring game and displayed flashes of speed and elusiveness according to Huff, finishing with 56 yards and a TD on 12 attempts. Neither player has any ADP data currently in Fantrax and wouldn't mind handcuffing both in the last two rounds of your drafts. With both the running back and wide receiver spots in a transition period, **Grant Wells** is the default top play here after throwing for 18 TDs as a first-year starter? Might we see Cramsey emphasize the pass more in 2021 similar to his days at Sam Houston State where his QB1 threw the ball 579 times? Probably not, but 30+ passing attempts per game would be a welcomed change from what we've seen the previous two years. Marshall brings back four of their top six pass catchers from a year ago, but lost a pair of projected starters to the portal. Vanderbilt transfer **Jayden Harrison** and incoming 3-star **Caleb Crooms** (listed as starting WR by Phil Steele) could fill the void, but I'm not targeting any pass-catchers for Marshall this year outside of tight end Xavier Gaines.

## Florida Atlantic

**Top Play:** RB Johnny Ford

**Potential Bust:** RB Malcolm Davidson

**Sleeper:** WR TJ Chase

**Impact Transfer:** QB N'Kosi Perry

**Dynasty Prospect:** WR John Dunmore

**Fantastic Freshman:** RB Zuberi Mobley



My Top Play for Florida Atlantic, **Johnny Ford**, is currently RB120 in my rankings which should exemplify my interests in the Owls for this season. That ranking is primarily due to the depth in the backfield with **Malcolm Davidson**, James Charles and Kelvin Dean all returning. From all accounts, though, Ford was electrifying in spring ball, and could potentially fulfill a D'Ernest Johnson-like role whom Willie Taggart had back at USF where he posted just over 800 total yards and 13 touchdowns. At 220 pounds, Davidson would be the best bet at becoming a possible bell-cow, but has struggled with injuries and consistency the last two years. My only interest in a Taggart QB1 happens only when there is a true dual-threat under center ala Quinton Flowers. While an upgrade over last year's disaster, **N'Kosi Perry** is not Quinton Flowers. I do have confidence, though, in Perry succeeding at the C-USA level and should facilitate the offense better which could result in better production out of the receivers, namely former Clemson product **TJ Chase** who led FAU in targets (46) and receptions (23). Incoming FR **Zuberi Mobley** had just three offers out of high school, one being Indiana, so that catches some of my attention.

## Middle Tennessee Blue Raiders

**Top Play:** WR Jarrin Pierce

**Potential Bust:** WR Jarrin Pierce

**Sleeper:** RB Amir Rasul

**Impact Transfer:** QB Bailey Hockman

**Dynasty Prospect:** WR Ja'shawn Sheffield

**Fantastic Freshman:** WR Javonte Sherman



I was elated when **Bailey Hockman** transferred to Middle Tennessee, thinking we are getting another southpaw to lead an Air Raid offense, similar to the days of old with Brent Stockstill running the show. Alas, dreams were crushed when OC Tony Franklin decided to retire and the eldest Stockstill hired Brent Dearmon away from Kansas. Not a knock on Dearmon per se, but don't see the fit with Hockman who is more of the conventional pocket passer type and not a dual-threat that typically is required for this system. Not to mention coaching quotes this offseason suggesting the offense could rival last year with Asher O'Hara at QB. Worth a stab late in drafts as a QB4-5 but just once has a Dearmon quarterback thrown for more than 20 TDs in a season over the last six years. If the offense is tailored to what Stockstill typically prefers, Hockman will be more of interest to me. **Jarrin Pierce** remains a full-point PPR option only after recording 59 receptions on 77 targets in nine games. Dearmon's WR1 numbers over the last seven years differ greatly if comparing to Stockstill – 46 catches per season since 2014 vs. 72 catches. Pierce failed to top 20 fantasy points in a single week in 2020, but recorded double-digit fantasy points six times. High floor, low ceiling. MTSU will undoubtedly run the ball more under Dearmon and have two P5 transfers coming off a COVID-19 opt-out in **Amir Rasul** (Florida State) and Martell Pettaway (West Virginia). The differing running styles between the two most likely lead to a shared backfield, but we did see 200+ carries in two of the last three years from Dearmon at previous stops. Every pass-catcher of note returns for Middle Tennessee, so probably not an opportunity for a youngster to step into a prominent role, but former Auburn transfer **Ja'Shawn Sheffield** and true FR **Javonte Sherman** could find their way into the mix immediately.

## Florida International Panthers

**Top Play:** RB D'Vonte Price

**Potential Bust:** RB D'Vonte Price

**Sleeper:** WR Shermar Thornton

**Impact Transfer:** WR Tyrese Chambers

**Dynasty Prospect:** RB Katravis Geter

**Fantastic Freshman:** QB Grayson James



As evidenced by our rankings, we love **D'Vonte Price** this season who will be running behind an offensive line that returns four starters and ranked 41<sup>st</sup> nationally in line yards which was fourth in C-USA last season. New offensive coordinator Andrew Breiner had an elite talent at running back during his time at Fordham between 2014-17 in Chase Edmonds who averaged over 130 rushing yards in three of his four seasons as the starter and topped 250 rushing attempts in each of those years. Breiner also has shown to get his running backs involved in the passing game as well, with Edmonds compiling 86 receptions in that span. An absolute steal at his current price of RB56 based on Fantrax's ADP as I have him ranked 30 spots higher at the RB position. Only concern is Price has never topped 100 carries in a single season in his career so its difficult to forecast how he'll hold up with an additional workload. Improved group of wide receivers for FIU this season, starting with the return of **Shermar Thornton** who missed all of last year, but led the Panthers with 51-668-5 in 2019. Sacred Heart transfer **Tyrese Chambers** will add size (6-foot-1) and speed that is currently lacking in the present WR room. With Price being a senior, I'm looking to next man up and incoming recruit **Katravis Geter Jr.** somehow landed with FIU despite offers from nearly half of the SEC conference. I haven't seen him selected once in any dynasty draft to date. **Grayson James**, an Elite 11 QB from this past cycle, will take over the QB1 job sooner rather than later.

## Old Dominion Monarchs

**Top Play:** WR Aaron Moore

**Potential Bust:** RB Elijah Davis

**Sleeper:** RB Blake Watson

**Impact Transfer:** TE Zack Kuntz

**Dynasty Prospect:** QB D.J. Mack Jr.

**Fantastic Freshman:** RB Jon-Luke Peaker



Unprecedented times trying to project how a team will perform coming off sitting out a season due to a pandemic. Now add a brand new coaching staff, and there are a wide range of possibilities for Old Dominion in 2021. Of the returning pieces I'd be willing to invest draft capital in, sophomore **Aaron Moore** sits atop the list as he led the Monarchs with 26 receptions and three touchdowns back in 2019. If you recall, much of that production came very late in the year, including a 14-194-1 performance on 23 targets in Week 13 of the season vs. Middle Tennessee. ODU has brought in a pair of P5 transfers since to bolster depth, including **Ali Jennings** (West Virginia) and Trey Blount (Georgia), with the former being listed as a starter according to Phil Steele. Speaking of Steele, there was also a bit of a shocker at RB where he listed **Blake Watson** atop the depth chart, ahead of previously projected starter **Lala Davis**. Head coach Ricky Rahne has tended to lean towards a RB who can proficiently catch the ball out of the backfield as evidenced by Saquon Barkley and Miles Sanders in the past, which is a strength of the multi-dimensional Watson who is the more explosive of the two backs from the limited viewing I've seen of the two. Situation to monitor. UCF transfer **D.J. Mack Jr.** is the likeliest candidate to land the QB1 job this year, and Rahne has shown in the past he's willing to give his quarterbacks plenty of opportunity to run the ball which is a strength of Mack. In two years of play-calling at Penn State, Rahne's QB1 carried the rock 170 and 116 times, respectively. Former 4-star recruit **Zach Kuntz** joined the team in the spring via the portal and could start immediately at tight end – another position Rahne has featured extensively in the past. Pat Freiermuth combined for 15 touchdowns in two seasons where Rahne was the primary play-caller.

## **Charlotte 49ers**

**Top Play:** QB Chris Reynolds

**Potential Bust:** QB Chris Reynolds

**Sleeper:** WR Victor Tucker

**Impact Transfer:** RB Shadrick Byrd

**Dynasty Prospect:** QB James Foster

**Fantastic Freshman:** RB Chavion Smith



Are we overlooking senior QB **Chris Reynolds** who is just two years removed from topping 3,300 total yards from scrimmage and 28 total TDs back in 2019? Reynolds tore a labrum on the first play of the 2020 season which led to struggles in the opener vs. Appalachian State, but went on to throw for eight touchdowns with zero turnovers – a problem in 2019 – the remainder of the way. Not sure if the Week 1 injury was the cause, but Reynolds' production on the ground saw a severe drop-off, going from 791 yards to just 36 yards on 50 attempts last year. This is not a high-volume passing attack so Reynolds has to be effective on the ground to remain on a CFF roster. The other reason for Reynolds being a potential bust is the addition of Texas A&M transfer **James Foster**, a former 4-star recruit who is a perfect fit stylistically for this offense that does require a mobile quarterback. With three years of eligibility remaining, and Reynolds being a senior, I'd look to add Foster in dynasty formats. Limited upside for receivers in this system given Charlotte won't throw the ball more than 300 total times in a year, but **Victor Tucker** has been a steady producer now for three seasons with 136 receptions and 11 TDs in his career. Best suited as a backup on your CFF roster. Muddied backfield with very little clarity coming out of spring ball as to who will comprise the starting backfield. Iowa transfer **Shadrick Byrd** appears to be the likeliest candidate as of now, but veteran Calvin Camp is still around, 3-star redshirt freshman **Elijah Turner** was a highly-touted recruit and true FR **Chavion Smith** is already being listed as the RB2 by Steele. This has the feel of a committee in 2021 but don't mind taking stabs on a team that runs the ball 54 percent of the time and has produced two 1,000-yard backs in the last three seasons.

## Western Kentucky Hilltoppers

**Top Play:** QB Bailey Zappe

**Potential Bust:** TE Joshua Simon

**Sleeper:** WR Mitchell Tinsley

**Impact Transfer:** WR Jerreth Sterns

**Dynasty Prospect:** QB Carson Baker

**Fantastic Freshman:** QB Chance McDonald



I am admittedly a bit conflicted heading into 2021 in my outlook of the Western Kentucky offense. Yes, you are lifting the primary architects of the Houston Baptist offense over to WKU, including the OC, starting QB and three integral receivers. But there's also a total of 10 offensive transfers that were added to the roster and implementing a brand new offensive system. That's a lot of moving pieces, and there were reported growing pains during spring ball, including QB **Bailey Zappe** throwing multiple pick sixes. Will those be ironed out by the regular season? One point you cannot deny is the volume in which Zappe will undoubtedly lead the nation in passing attempts as he averaged 46 attempts per season in the last three years. Over the course of the last seven years, this system averages just over 337 passing yards per game, but my trepidation stems from 2018 – the first season at Houston Baptist where Zach Kittley was the primary play-caller. Zappe averaged just 255 YPG in that initial season, drastically lower than the running average. With Zappe showing up on NFL radars, best to secure the “next man up” as a late dynasty stash for future seasons when this offense will really take off. San Diego State transfer **Carson Baker** was added in the offseason, as well as 3-star prospect **Chance McDonald**. Love **Joshua Simon**, but I wouldn't go spending any draft capital on tight ends in this system as the position has produced all of 12 receptions the last seven years combined. I wonder if that changes potentially as WKU also brought in talented Buffalo transfer Zac Lefebvre but the evidence is overwhelmingly clear the position isn't utilized much in a receiving role. Running backs should also be ignored as they rarely see enough volume both on the ground and as pass-catchers. As for WRs to target in this system, we have evidence of both the slot and outside receivers finishing as the top point producers – the Air Raid is dissimilar from the Run'N Shoot where the offense flows strictly through the middle of the field. **Jerreth Sterns** is the likeliest candidate to finish the year as WR1, posting 47-454-5 in just four games last season. His top counterpart, Ben Ratzlaff, was not around during the spring but shouldn't have much of a learning curve since he is another HBU transport. The forgotten name here that shouldn't be ignored is last year's leading receiver for the Hilltoppers, **Mitchell Tinsley**, who gives the room a wealth of versatility having both play inside and out in 2020. His price is next to nothing at this point, and if WKU is throwing it around 50 times a game this season, that should be enough to make three receivers relevant in CFF.

## UAB Blazers

**Top Play:** RB DeWayne McBride

**Potential Bust:** WR Trea Shropshire

**Sleeper:** n/a

**Impact Transfer:** RB Lee Witherspoon

**Dynasty Prospect:** RB DeWayne McBride

**Fantastic Freshman:** WR Jordan Palmer



Easy choice here for top play with running back **DeWayne McBride** who averaged over 10 yards per carry as the RB2 last season behind Spencer Brown. Now steps into a starting job with all five starters back along the offensive line which graded out as the second best unit in the conference behind Marshall last year, per PFF. There is depth in the RB room with veteran Lucious Stanley and Mississippi State transfer **Lee Witherspoon**, but this is an system that prefers to ride a workhorse, with the RB1 averaging 220 carries over the last five seasons. The Blazers ranked 19<sup>th</sup> in the country in team rushing play percentage (59.7%) in 2020 and their 68 percent mark over the last three years puts them at No. 7 nationally so this is a team under Bill Clark that prefers to keep it on the ground. 6-foot-2 junior **Trea Shropshire** is our pick as the primary target in the passing game following his 5-180-1 performance in the finally against Marshall last year, but was mostly a non-factor prior to that game so a bit of risk if targeting him as a late-round pick.

## UTSA Roadrunners

**Top Play:** RB Sincere McCormick

**Potential Bust:** QB Frank Harris

**Sleeper:** n/a

**Impact Transfer:** WR Kennedy Lewis

**Dynasty Prospect:** RB De'Anthony Lewis

**Fantastic Freshman:** RB KeVorian Barnes



Not going to do a real deep dive here with 10 starters back on offense so we know what to expect of UTSA entering 2021. **Sincere McCormick** will run behind an offensive line that returns all five starters and ranked 33<sup>rd</sup> nationally in line yards so they were pushing defenders around in the C-USA. Light work for McCormick in the non-conference portion of the schedule this season with Illinois, Lamar, Memphis and UNLV – just one team (UAB) ranks in the Top 50 in Defensive SP+ on the Roadrunners schedule which should mean smooth sailing for McCormick. Happy to see **Frank Harris** stay relatively healthy for an entire season, averaging over 21 FPPG, including four games in which he topped the 30+ point mark. Probably best suited as a bestball option considering Harris also had four games in which he failed to reach double-digit fantasy points. Every notable WR is back, including Zakhari Franklin and Joshua Cephus, while adding in a pair of transfers in Tre'Von Bradley (Houston) and **Kennedy Lewis** (Oklahoma). With this likely being McCormick's last season in college, finding his replacement will be critical in an offense that ran the ball 56 percent of the time in 2020. Current depth chart behind McCormick is filled by underutilized upperclassmen so our attention is focused more on the youth, and UTSA brought in two 3-star recruits in **De'Anthony Lewis** and **KeVorian Barnes** who should get a look in 2022.

## North Texas Mean Green

**Top Play:** WR Jyaire Shorter

**Potential Bust:** QB Austin Aune

**Sleeper:** WR Loronzo Thompson

**Impact Transfer:** WR Tommy Bush

**Dynasty Prospect:** QB Jace Ruder

**Fantastic Freshman:** WR Caleb Johnson



I'm certain by the end of the offseason you all will be sick and tired of hearing me discuss **Jyaire Shorter** and the North Texas receivers. But it truly is imperative we figure out a pecking order here as this UNT offense has averaged 283 passing yards per game or more for the last four years. At least two, if not three, receivers will be relevant in CFF this season as I do not anticipate anyone having a target share similar to Jaelon Darden last year. Shorter is obviously my top choice to lead the group here as I believe in his overall talent, and he has a proven track record already with nine receiving touchdowns as a redshirt FR. He barely participated in the spring, though, after missing most of last year due to injury so we need to monitor his status. **Loronzo Thompson** switched over to receiver late last season after playing defense to begin the year, and recorded two TDs in the bowl game vs. Appalachian State. He followed that up with a strong spring and could start in the slot. Former 4-star recruit and Georgia transfer **Tommy Bush** joined the team this offseason and I suspect he will start immediately opposite Shorter on the outside. Physical traits are tantalizing at 6-foot-5 and a sub 4.5 40-yard dash, but Bush did next to nothing during his time in Athens. Wait and see there, but he's an excellent choice near the end of drafts as a handcuff to Shorter. QB **Austin Aune** had a strong spring from all accounts and was the MVP of the spring game – albeit playing against the second-team defense. The quarterback position won't be sorted out until the summer when **Jace Ruder**, a North Carolina transfer, arrives on campus. Any North Texas recruit with offers from Alabama, Florida and Oklahoma immediately get our attention. **Caleb Johnson** as elite speed, running a 10.58 in the 100 meters and could nab a starting spot as quickly as this year.



## Louisiana Tech Bulldogs

**Top Play:** RB Marcus Williams

**Potential Bust:** RB Marcus Williams

**Sleeper:** WR Smoke Harris

**Impact Transfer:** WR Samuel Emilus

**Dynasty Prospect:** WR Jerrod Means

**Fantastic Freshman:** WR Solomon Lewis



I've finally come to the realization that the high-flying days of Ryan Higgins, Trent Taylor and Carlos Henderson are long gone as Louisiana Tech fell all the way down to 11<sup>th</sup> in Conference USA in total offense and sixth in scoring, averaging just 26.7 PPG. And Skip Holtz appears intent on running it back with the same quarterbacks from last year and just seven starters returning, so how much improvement will we see from this group in 2021? Appalachian State transfer **Marcus Williams** appears set to step in as the RB1 which has typically been a profitable spot with five 1,000-yard seasons in the last seven years. Williams' production will depend largely on how the offensive line coalesces, as they return just two starters and bring in two G5 transfers to fill in the gaps. Despite my distaste for the La. Tech QBs, **Smoke Harris'** price at WR109 in ADP makes him a viable option in PPR formats as a WR4-5 as the Bulldogs have to replace 106 vacated targets. To replace those 106 targets, Holtz added a pair of transfers in former UMass receiver **Samuel Emilus** and Tennessee wideout **Jerrod Means** who is already being projected as a starter by Steele.

## Rice Owls

**Top Play:** QB Luke McCaffrey

**Potential Bust:** RB Khalan Griffin

**Sleeper:** WR Brad Rozner

**Impact Transfer:** QB Luke McCaffrey

**Dynasty Prospect:** QB Luke McCaffrey

**Fantastic Freshman:** TE Jaggar Hebeisen



Familiarity with the McCaffrey family helped head coach Mike Bloomgren land the youngest brother, Luke, as the likely new Rice starting QB for 2021. There will need to be a stylistic shift on offense with McCaffrey now in the fold as he is not proficient enough of a passer to throw it 29 times per contest like Mike Collins did a year ago. What makes things difficult to project for McCaffrey is no quarterback under either Bloomgren or OC Marques Tuiasosopo have had a QB top 100 carries in a season over the last seven years which you'd have to assume McCaffrey will do given his legs are his greatest commodity. Might we see some carries taken away from the running backs as there is little to no clarity as to who will be the guy in the backfield next season? **Khalan Griffin** was getting the positive reports coming out of spring ball and still remains out best bet to win the job, but Steele threw a wrench into that listing little-used sophomore Ari Broussard, a special teams performer as the starter. We've seen plenty of instances from Bloomgren during his time with Stanford that he prefers to have a 200+ or even 300-carry bell cow, but that player just hasn't emerged for Rice during the recruiting process. Best to avoid the group entirely, especially with McCaffrey now in the fold. **Brad Rozner** is back as the WR1 after opting out last season, and is a matchup problem for defenses at 6-foot-5. He posted 55-770-5 back in 2019.

## Southern Mississippi Golden Eagles

**Top Play:** RB Frank Gore Jr.

**Potential Bust:** WR Jason Brownlee

**Sleeper:** QB Trey Lowe

**Impact Transfer:** RB Dajon Richard

**Dynasty Prospect:** QB Trey Lowe

**Fantastic Freshman:** QB Ty Keyes



Focus for Southern Miss is at running back in the new system under new head coach Will Hall where his offenses at Tulane ran the ball 60 percent of the time – ranked 20<sup>th</sup> nationally in 2020. And Hall inherits a good one in **Frank Gore Jr.** who led the Golden Eagles with 708 yards (5.85 YPC) and two touchdowns as a true freshman. While we love the player, and the family lineage, projecting out how Gore Jr. will perform this year and beyond is a predicament. For one, Hall has rarely had a 200+ carry back as a primary play-caller. So, if we aren't seeing high volume from Gore Jr., we will be relying on his ability to score touchdowns yes? But at 185 pounds, how many reps will the coaching staff be willing to give him? Could some of those carries go towards 220-pound quarterback **Trey Lowe** who will almost assuredly be the starter this season? If USM's offense rivals what we saw from Hall at Tulane, the QB1 for the Green Wave combined for 20 rushing TDs the last two seasons. Lowe isn't a burner, but showed he is plenty mobile, rushing for 70+ yards in the finale last year vs. Florida Atlantic. Rarely, if ever, is a wide receiver relevant in this system so I don't have much interest in projected WR1 **Jason Brownlee**. Running seven-year average comes out to just 46-620-5.

## UTEP Miners

**Top Play:** RB Deion Hankins

**Potential Bust:** RB Deion Hankins

**Sleeper:** WR Jacob Cowingv

**Impact Transfer:** WR Tyrin Smith

**Dynasty Prospect:** RB Deion Hankins

**Fantastic Freshman:** WR Jeremiah Ballard



No sense in doing an extreme deep dive into a team like UTEP where head coach Dana Dimel, who is already on the hot seat, is trying to save his job by hiring one of the blandest P5 coordinators in the last decade of college football in former Michigan State OC Dave Warner. The good news is UTEP will bring back most of their starters back on offense, including rising star running back **Deion Hankins** who averaged 84 yards per game on the ground with nine touchdowns in 2020. Biggest concern here is depth in the backfield with veteran Ronald Awatt and the return of Quardraiz Wadley who is back from injury. Dimel does not have a 200+ carry running back in the last seven seasons, but we do have three instances of Michigan State RBs topping that mark when Warner was calling the shots so perhaps his input leads to increased usage for Hankins. All five starters are back on the OL. UTEP also boasts an excellent WR corps led by **Jacob Cowing** and Justin Garrett who accounted for 59 percent of the team's target share. Late-round picks at best, though, as this is not a high-volume passing offense. JUCO transfer **Tyrin Smith** made waves in the spring and is expected to step right into a starting role in the slot. Overall, this should be an improved offensive unit with the returning pieces as long as the coaching staff doesn't screw the pooch.