



CHARLOTTE 49ERS

2023 Record: 3-9

American Athletic Conference

Charlotte, NC

FBS Ranking

113



TERRON KELLMAN – RB

Photo via @RonKellman on X

A transfer portal class ranking of #66 may not seem like anything significant, but compare it to the rankings of other American Conference members and you'll discover that the portal class is in the upper echelon of Group of 5 programs. Head coach Biff Poggi is one of the most interesting characters in college football and he's eager to win and win now. Charlotte didn't win as much as he hoped in their first season in the American but in fairness to Poggi and his staff, the move in conferences was a jump up in competition, especially for a program that hasn't even been in existence for 10 years.

Year two should see the 49ers improve although the schedule doesn't exactly do them any favors. Poggi had had just 10 returning starters in 2023 and this year he has seven back on the offense alone. The vast majority of transfers he's bringing into the program are former "Power 4" athletes. That billing is not always a guarantee of success, but it does give Charlotte the potential to be far more competitive in the conference than some might otherwise guess based on last year's record.

OFFENSE

The unit is most need of a facelift is the offense. The 49ers only scratched across 17.5 points per game which was in the bottom 10 of all FBS teams. The 49ers were shutout against Navy and they scored only 7 points against both Florida and Rice. Step one in the improvement process will be finding a reliable option at quarterback. With no disrespect to the valiant efforts of former walk-ons **Trexler Ivey** and **Steven Johnson**, the ball ended up in the hands of defenders more than twice as often as it did to a receiver in the end zone. In fairness for both quarterbacks, the 49ers had no dependable running game to rely on (**Jalon Jones** was the leader at quarterback with 476 yards). Ivey is still on the roster but the starting nod will likely go to Florida transfer **Max Brown**. Brown played a majority of the Gators' game against Florida State with mixed results although he was running for his life most of the night. He did run for 42 yards on 7 carries against Missouri (which included one sack) so he'll bring the same dual-threat option that Jones did for Charlotte last season.

While the running game was far from effective, they do bring back their two top running backs in **Terron Kellman** and **Hashaun Wilson**. Charlotte adds **CJ Stokes** to the room out of Michigan (a common theme on the roster given Poggi's connection to Ann Arbor). Stokes didn't see the field much behind **Blake Corum** and **Donovan Edwards** the last two seasons but he could even be the featured back this season. Poggi is also looking to overhaul the offensive line through the portal. **Jonny King** returns at center after making eight starts but the rest of the starting five could all be transfers including **Mitchell Mayes** who started five games at Clemson last season. Based on recruiting rankings alone, this line should be much improved, but time will tell how well the unit is able to gel in Mike Miller's offense.

Five of the top six pass catchers also return. **Jairus Mack** led the way with 453 yards while **Colin Weber** finished the year with a team-high 34 catches and 362 yards. Charlotte only completed 186 passes last season (the fewest in the conference to any team not named Navy) so simply by virtue of better quarterback play this unit should be much more productive. There are key transfers at this position too including **O'Mega Blake** who hauled in 19 passes for 250 yards and two touchdowns with South Carolina last season. His path to Charlotte was unique and featured a very brief stop in East Carolina this spring.

DEFENSE

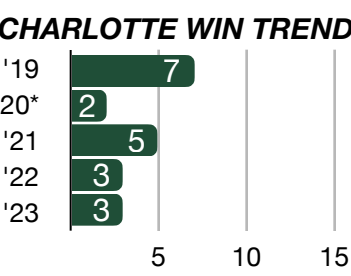
The defense returns only five starters but could still be improved especially if the offense holds on to the ball longer. As with the offense, defensive coordinator will look to plug and play a host of transfers. **Dontae Balfour** is the leading returning tackler. Meanwhile, **Demon Clowney** will look to add to his 2.5 sacks from last season alongside fellow defensive end/linebacker hybrids **Stone Handy** and **Prince Bemah**. Handy and Bemah play the "buck" position in Ryan Osborn's scheme. In his first season, Osborn drastically improved the defense and the 49ers improved their scoring offense but over 10 points.

Both the line and secondaries are less experienced than the linebackers listed above but there are several former highly-touted high school products who will step into bigger roles via the transfer portal. **Ja'Quarious Conley** is one of those players who made 10 starts the past two seasons with nearby UNC.

Will transfer portal experiment net immediate results for the Niners?

HC: Biff Poggi
(2nd Year, 3-9)
OC: Mike Miller
(2nd Year)
DC: Ryan Osborn
(2nd Year)

2024 Class Rankings
Recruiting
74
Transfer Portal
66
Via 24/7 Sports



2023 Results (3-9)
S. Carolina State (W 24-3)
@ Maryland (L 20-38)
Georgia State (L 25-41)
@ Florida (L 7-22)
@ SMU (L 16-34)
Navy (L 0-14)
@ East Carolina (W 10-7)
Florida Atlantic (L 16-38)
@ Tulsa (W 33-26)
Memphis (L 38-44)
Rice (L 7-28)
@ South Florida (L 14-48)

CHARLOTTE

Wk	2024 Charlotte Schedule	
1	Sat, Aug 31	vs. James Madison
2	Sat, Sep 7	@ North Carolina
3	Sat, Sept 14	vs. Gardner-Webb
4	Sat, Sept 21	@ Indiana
5	Sat, Sept 28	@ Rice
6	Sat, Oct 5	vs. East Carolina
8	Sat, Oct 19	@ Navy
9	Sat, Oct 26	@ Memphis
10	Thu, Oct 31	vs. Tulane
12	Sat, Nov 16	vs. South Florida
13	Sat, Nov 23	@ Florida Atlantic
14	Sat, Nov 30	vs. UAB

Home Away

Key Games

vs. James Madison: The Dukes surprised the college football world with a tremendous 11-2 season in their first year in the FBS. They'll be a tough opponent for Charlotte who is looking to snap a six-game home losing streak.
vs. East Carolina: In their first meeting as FBS opponents, the 49ers claimed a victory in a defensive slugfest. The Pirates were held to just 127 yards.
vs. Tulane: The Green Wave come visiting on a Thursday night. If the 49ers are going to pull a big upset against a top competitor in the conference, why not do it on a weeknight when more eyes are following the action at Jerry Richardson Stadium?

Player Spotlight

Photo via Carolina Gridiron

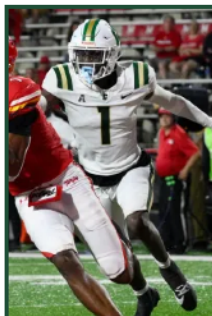


JAIUS MACK – WR

The Athens native showed his big play ability for Charlotte last season by recording 453 yards on only 25 receptions. He had his best game against Tulsa (including his longest reception of the season - 51 yards) and helped guide the 49ers to a win in a 7 catch, 124 yard performance. 13 of his 25 catches came in the final three games of the season and that positive momentum should springboard him to an impact year in 2024.

2023 Stats: 25 REC, 453 YDS, 2 TD

Photo via Baltimore Sun



DONTAE BALFOUR – CB

Balfour is the team's leading returning tackler and he landed himself on the third-team All-AAC list after 11 pass breakups (tying a school record) and a timely interception to clinch an overtime victory over Tulsa. He also forced a pair of fumbles. All of that was accomplished in his sophomore season and he enters the 2024 season as the most experienced member of the Charlotte secondary.

2023 Stats: 71 REC, 996 YDS, 3 TD

Photo via DLR Group



Jerry Richardson Stadium (15,314)



Colin WEBER

SPECIAL TEAMS

Yes, Poggi even used the portal for special teams. Why shouldn't he? Charlotte scoops up **Michael O'Shaughnessy** from Michigan State (and Ohio State before that) to do the punting. The 49ers averaged 37.5 yards in net punting and O'Shaughnessy averaged 41.7 last year with the Spartans. **Kyle Cunanan** returns to place kick after hitting 9 of 15 field goals and a long of 49 yards. Running back **Henry Rutledge** made a name for himself after a punt return for a touchdown and he handles kickoffs, too.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Watching the various portal strategies in the past few seasons has been fascinating. Some schools like Clemson have completely ignored the portal while others like Colorado and Ole Miss have taken full advantage. Charlotte certainly falls into the latter category but doesn't get the media attention that some of the bigger schools do.

While I really like many of the additions to this roster and think that Charlotte will be better on both sides of the ball, the schedule is about as tough as any in the conference. The non-conference features trips to North Carolina and Indiana and the 49ers face Memphis, Tulane, and South Florida back to back to back. Charlotte will likely be an underdog in their season opener at home against a James Madison team that won 11 games last season. There's a chance Charlotte overachieves, and they'll need to if they want to go bowling.

Appointment Television



VS.



Saturday, October 5

Will these two in-state schools develop a rivalry? The conference has set up the schedule to where they will play every year. Last year, the 49ers had their way with the Pirates in total yardage, winning the battle 328 to 127, although the scoreboard read 10-7 when the final whistle blew due mostly to turnover issues. Both teams are looking for bounce-back seasons and the winner will have a leg up in their rebuild.

2023 Statistics

Offense			Defense		
Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank	Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank
Points	17.5	123	Points	28.6	88
Rushing	145.0	81	Rushing	161.5	87
Passing	167.8	116	Passing	212.7	45
Total	312.8	115	Total	374.2	59
Sacks	31	T-99	Sacks	20	T-106

2024 Projection

3-9

12th in AAC

Trophy Case



XO



XO



XO