

# 2022 FOOTBALL AMERICA PRE-SEASON OVERVIEW



- A** **Golden Bay** bolstered its line with the signing of All-FA guard Keke Aheahe from SA. They'll need all the blocking help they can get with RB Deuce Caudill injured, out for year--rookie RB Asyrus Tello will have to step up. On defense, top draft pick CB Nickendre Lott plus free-agent pick-up Cade Ejiya make for an imposing secondary. Early odds-on favorite to earn title.
- A** **Memphis** benefits from the return of Joe Mattox and a healthy Keon Portress, Keivare Langhorne. Rookie kicker John McRae provides some "unknown." Top rookies are LB Sam Medford and DL Titus Ta'ase. Not much free-agent activity here, explosive WR/KR Trillion Ben-Burgess was picked up from St. Louis. The return of established franchise stars to their "A games" is the story in Memphis, and should be enough for this club to contend strongly.
- B+** **New England** snags one of the big free-agent prizes in G Minkah Elijah and juggles the offensive line to accommodate him. There's a possible QB controversy between Juenemann and Pawlawski. OL Omi Kelaho opts to sit out '22 rather than take the club's contract offer, which he feels under-pays him. Workhorse RB Hassan Driggs is hurt, expected to play sparingly, RB Marlon Bright picks up the slack. WR Chandler Daxon is, well, Chandler Daxon--a big target with big-play potential. Two more key free-agent signings bulked up the defense, CB Uriah Smiley and LB Marqui Lamarr. Dark horse candidate to win it all.
- B+** **Detroit** made edge rusher Daniel Cyphers it's big off-season acquisition. Paired with last year's free-agent pick-up DE Koa Ihenachko, they give Detroit formidable pressure on both sides of the line. There was only minor shuffling on a mostly-held over offense that was productive enough in '21. Definite playoff potential.
- B** **Orlando** made the off-season "move of the year" by signing long-time Chicago QB Matt Harrell, with the idea of resolving issues at that position after years of mis-steps, false starts and flops. Now moving well into his 30s, Harrell has proven to be one of the league's most consistent passers over the past decade. All-league TE Max Crespo was lured away from San Diego and the club traded up in the draft to snag college star Iosefa Ra-El to serve as Harrell's main targets. Chicago pals Billy Howey and Jonte Reed followed Harrell from Chicago to make it a comfortable transition.
- B** **Oklahoma City** focused on free-agency to forge its hopes for '22, picking up quality starters in DE Kevin Madding, DT Herman Faris, OL Ben Castle and WR Laremy Bell. There's minimal help coming from the draft (multiple picks were sent to Portland for Madding), but three of last year's rookies (OL Jyaire Stout, FS Trejan Vigil and LB TreShaun Kourtis) will helm starting roles in '22. The club is hoping for more consistency from QB Corey Bondarenko, with a possible push from backup QB Dallas Hedrick.
- B-** **St. Louis** bolsters its defensive front with free-agent DE Myles Spencer and rookie DT Evan Tanoai and pads the secondary with a number of less-notable but still solid free agent pickups. Playmaking LB/P Clyde Absher moves to MLB. It's mostly the same cast as last year on offense, but rookie Tobi Upchurch should add some excitement.
- C** **San Antonio** has huge rookie DT Julien Wallace for immediate defensive impact and two impressive rookies on offense, RB Ernesto Bibby and WR Tru Peters-Kellogg. Free agent DBs Jalen Johnson and Nnamdi Tautaalo join the secondary and holdover LB Cardale Copes anchors the line--there should be solid defense in the Alamo City. Gunslinging QB Billy Whittle will get added protection for his deep throws with the addition of all-FA center Lee Ursich from New York.
- C** **Portland** will see its '22 season defined by loss of QB Bryce Bollinger to injury. Brayden Peace was quickly acquired from Orlando to vie for the fill-in starter job with rookie Ty Wade and journeyman Josh Peterson. There'll be more hand-offs to RB Khalil Aldredge. Rookie WR Trumane Clarke and TE's Kyle Reis and Paul Habermehl provide inviting targets to whomever's taking the snaps. LB Cam Little again anchors a stiff front seven, undone last year by a mostly sub-par secondary. That group must improve in '22 for Portland to maintain post-season hopes.
- D+** **San Diego** had a rough off-season, after a big year in '21. Free-agent losses include DE Rashad Lovings, LB Daniel Cyphers, SS Jalen Johnson, CE Ben Castle and TE Max Crespo--quality players not easily replaced. Add to that pre-season injuries to OT Ryan Senechal and LB Uriel To'o, and less-than-healthy status from QB Geoff Russell and others and the situation grows even murkier. Three rookies will start in the heart of the defense: SS Khalid Brown, ILBs Tavien Griffin and Cade Canis. How quickly they jell may well determine whether the club makes a playoff return in '22.
- D** **Chicago** will have a new look for '22 with the departure of long-time QB Matt Harrell and his high-octane passing arm. It's a toss-up as to who will take over for Harrell, last year's staid back-up Brett Luckenbaugh or free-agent improviser Bo Stoeber. A host of draft picks have made the roster but mostly as fill-ins--none of them appear to have secured starting roles. Unquestionably a rebuilding year in the Windy City.
- D-** **New York** ended its experiment with QB Carson Eubank after just one season--he'll be in San Diego this year backing up Geoff Russell. A mixed-bag of signal callers will lead the Gotham squad in '22; free-agent Mason Quibodeaux, who was the spring league's MVP, will battle it out with rookie Matt McMahon and holdover vet Roderick Young. LB Jacques Farior was brought in to stabilize a defense similarly in transition, with LB Tupac Rachman and DE Jatavis Swopes the only other recognizable names.