

NEW YORK @ WASHINGTON

(Washington leads the all-time series between these two franchises 14-7-0)

Why?

New York defeated Washington in their earlier meeting 40-34 in week four and the Knights are chasing New Jersey for the United Coastal Division crown. Last season the Knights ended a twelve-year post-season drought but lost in the Wild Card round to Carlisle 30-27. The Knights have been playing well as of late, but are coming off of a gut-wrenching loss (30-27) to Birmingham last week on a Jason Hairston two-yard pass play to WR Irvin Harvey with one tick on the clock.

Washington would like to salvage its season any way they can, playing spoiler to the Knights post-season aspirations would help to heal the pain of this less than an inspiring season. The Freebirds last made a playoff appearance in the 2019 Wild Card Round losing to Cincinnati 27-21.

What to watch for?

NEW YORK:

Twenty-two-year-old New York **QB Javier Hutchison** has been given the playbook in only his second season in the league. Hutchison is doing quite well as a former fifth-round selection out of Tulane, he is third the CFA in passing yardage with 3,012 to go along with his 23:6 TD:INT ratio, a 61.4% completion rate, as well as a 98.0 QBR.

A former number one draft selection in 2023's CFA draft is **RB Robert Dubois**, who at 5'11" 215 lb. is the prototypical position player you would expect from the University of Running backs (a.k.a. Georgia). Dubois is a grinder and adds a complexity to the New York backfield to keep the attention of opposing defensive coordinators. Dubois rushed for 1,347 yards in his rookie season but missed a good chunk of his sophomore season with knee issues. This season he is sitting at 931-yards rushing (5th) and though his yards-per-carry are not particularly noteworthy (3.8). He is agile with a side of acceleration just waiting to bust a big play.

There are reasons why the Knights throw the ball a lot and those reasons are a veteran group of wideouts, maybe the most elderly unit in the CFA. **John Sanchez**(44/762/3) is probably go this week recovering from a bulging disk. Lining up along with Sanchez are **Martin Bui** (40/682/3), **Manuel Hamel** (50/735/8), and **Ernest Colby**, who arguably is the most gifted of the lot, but has seemingly fallen out of favor with **HC Nick Crozier** and his **OC Lance Harbor**. The player that may be overlooked in this passing attack is **HB James Baily**, who is Hutchison's safety valve in tight spots. Baily actually leads the team in receptions with sixty-catches but is only average 6.0-ypr. On the edges, **OT Arthur Knoll** suffered a broken arm is week six and is on the mend, while **OT Jacob Wilson** out for the season with a ruptured Achilles. The task of keeping Hutchison of the turf is reliant to the quick feet and good hands of **Corey Lind** and **Avery Babin**, who has done more than an admirable job in filling in for Knoll with thirty-six pancakes over the last five-plus games.

OGs Gary Blackmon (25) and Foster Jones (31) anchor the interior part of the offensive line. They have combined for 78-pancakes and have allowed 6-sacks through eleven contests thus far.

The Knights are #1 in plays from scrimmage utilizing their four-minute offense to keeping the defense from liberally substituting players. This game plan of attack is partly due to the fact that the Knights defense is rather suspect ranking near the bottom in most of the major defensive categories; though New York does lead the league with fifteen interceptions and ten forced fumbles.

A previous career long Hammerhead, **LB/ROV Marcel Hyland** has brought his talents to the right coast and is paying off dividends with his 98-tackles, seven sacks, and two-pass interceptions. This is the type

of veteran stability and presence that the Knights need to build the confidence of their younger players. Joining Hyland on the defensive second-tier of the defense are **LB Frederick Ferrer** who has recorded nine sacks on the season, and **LB John Lewis** who has notch seventy-five tackles to go with his four sacks.

Because the interior defensive line is underwhelming, to help the linebacking corps to sure up the defensive side of the ball are **DEs William Pereira** (11-TFL, 7-Sacks) and **Dan Dixon** (7-TFL, 7-Sacks). Initially, Dixon was not penciled in at the LDE spot, this spot on the line was to be a competition between vets **Brian Dunn** (29) and **Douglas Vieira** (31), but young Turk Dixon's unorthodox style of play, along with his 280-lb. frame has caused problems for the opposing offenses tackles.

Though the Knights seem to be a sieve on defense, they do account for some fine individual performances on the year. There is **CB Martin Embry**, at thirty-two, still has the tools to lock-down his side of the field. Embry just signed a five-year extension with the Knights that will garner him \$3.8M per year. This amount is justified by his play on the field; 41-Tcks/4-Ints/16-PD.

With the other cornerback slot not performing up to expectations, it is the play of another veteran, thirty-four-year-old FS Darron McAllister in centerfield that takes up some of the slack in the secondary. McAllister has been a pleasant surprise to the front-office with his play thus far; 48-Tcks/4-Ints/4-Scks.

WASHINGTON:

With starting **QB Christopher Hein** again doubtful with a partially torn PCL, the Freebirds will again turn to six-year man out of Stanford **Clay Wright**. Wright has filled in competently over last five-game stretch throwing for 596-yards to go along with his five touchdowns and only two interceptions.

Washington has historically a run-first team, and with the situation, with Hein's injury, the Freebirds are now leaning on the ground game again to level the field. Washington only dresses three running-backs, and the lion's share of the carries have gone to **Tony Dwyer** (278/820/5/2.9). Dwyer is doubtful this week due to severe migraines, so the job is in the hands of 6'5" 227-lb. **Burl Schreiber**, who has accounted for 23-carries and 86-yards this year. The third option would be **Fred Turney** who has yet to get a touch this season; Washington running backs as a whole are only gaining 3.2-ypc.

Making the sledding quite a bit tougher is that one the starting offensive guards, **James Lyon** is missing due to a broken hip; out since week-4. Young guns **David Clark** and **John Hanks** are doing what they can, but the middle of this offensive line is barely up to the task. **Gonzo Slaton** at LT and **RT Steve Roberts** will be shoring up the edges of the line the best they can, but this Freebird squad is due for an upgrade if they want to keep Hein healthy into the foreseeable future.

Washington **WR Mark Hurst** has been the "main" man, as well as a "marked" man for the Freebird's receiving corps. This fact will be even more in the spotlight against New York with the mainstays of the wide receiver stable gimpy or not available. Sure-handed Mike Machado if out possible for the remainder of the season with a torn ACL suffered in a week-nine loss to Costa Rica. The speedster on the team, Theo Alfred suffered a partial tear of his ACL in week-3 and is still questionable for this week. In a nutshell, the Freebird offense is on life support.

Defensively what the Freebirds do well is to stymie the run; they are ranked 9th in the CFA against running the ball. The front-seven ceiling is not what you would call "high". The linebacking unit is a free-form gaggle of "who?", most of these starters would be watching the game from the sidelines on other teams. Not helping the front line is that they are missing their co-sack leader **DE Ed Sullivan** for the year with a ruptured Achilles tendon, and starting **DT Matt Rogers** will play with a broken jaw. The one bright

spot if there is one on the line is **DE Craig Moore**, who may or not be double teamed due to his less than dominating stature (248-lb.).

Adding his skill-set to stuffing the run is thumper **SS David Forsythe**, who has sixty-one tackles on the year to go along with his two sacks and one interception.

That other co-leader with 7-sacks is **LB Johnny Wade**, who also has claimed 78-tackles eight of those were tackles-for-loss; but misses more tackles than he should.

In the secondary **CB Pat Kozlowski** is the leader. Along with speedy **Mike Rawls**, they patrol the edges of the defense. The pass defense took another hit last week with the loss of **FS James Wyatt** with a broken leg; he is likely out for the season.

TALE OF THE TAPE:

NEW YORK:

Opponents combined record (73-48 • .598) [Knight's' Run/Pass ratio 38%/62%]

Offense:

Points Scored – 27.4 (7th)

Total Yards – 385.1 (9th)

Rush Yards – 102.4 (14th)

Pass Yards – 282.7 (5th)

Defense:

Points Allowed – 25.1 (25th)

Total Yards Allowed – 382.6 (28th)

Rush Yards Allowed – 126.5 (28th)

Pass Yards Allowed – 256.2 (21st)

° Injuries Note:

+ DT Arthur Knoll – Questionable (Broken Arm)

+ OT Jacob Wilson Out 8-12 weeks (Ruptured Achilles)

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WASHINGTON:

Opponents combined record (55-66 • .455) [Freebird's' Run/Pass ratio 53%/47%]

Offense:

Points Scored – 22.1 (15th)

Total Yards – 364.5 (14th)

Rush Yards – 104.3 (15th)

Pass Yards – 260.3 (12th)

Defense:

Points Allowed – 24.6 (23rd)

Total Yards Allowed – 382.4 (25th)

Rush Yards Allowed – 95.3 (9th)

Pass Yards Allowed – 287.1 (28th)

° Injuries Note:

- + TE Theo Alfred – Questionable (Torn ACL)
- + QB Christopher Hein – Doubtful (Torn PCL)
- + RB Tony Dwyer – Doubtful (Severe migraines)
- + G James Lyon – Out 2-4 weeks (Broken hip)
- + WR John Machado – Out 6-8 weeks (Torn ACL)
- + FS James Wyatt – Out 6-8 weeks (Fractured leg)
- + DE Edward Sullivan – Out 8-12 weeks (Ruptured Achilles)

My Pick:

The Knights have faced stiffer competition this season. Three of their five—losses were by five points or less, the only real beat-downs were to the top two contenders in the United Conference, San Francisco, and West Hampstead. With the Rangy PK Richard Lees in his 14th season in the league and is enjoying a productive year, an ace in the hole for the Knights. New York is also one of the least penalized teams in the league.

Washington has encountered a myriad of injuries which does not bode well, but this is a division rivalry, and these games are in the moment events with records becoming meaningless.

I have to go with the Knights on the road here, they are knocking loudly on the playoff door.

Knights - 24

Freebirds – 13

The Line:

Line: Wsh (+1.5)

O/U: 50.0

~ Warren Pease – OSN Contributing Writer