

Greater New Bedford Voc-Tech Vs. Apponequet Football Preview

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Contributor

There's something brewing at GNB Voc-Tech, and it's not in the culinary arts program.

It's out on the turf at Jeffrey E. Riley Stadium, where third-year coach Justin Cruz has generated enough excitement to get more than 100 prospective players out for a wonky Fall 2 season.

With that excitement has also come Ws.

After losing his first four games as a head coach in 2018, Cruz has led the Bears to an 11-8 record over their last 19 games, including a playoff appearance. Voc-Tech won four of its final six games in 2019 for a 6-5 final mark.

"We're just kind of building and I think the program is in the right direction," Cruz said. "We have guys competing all over the field."

Here's everything you need to know as the Bears open their 2020-21 season.

When is the game?

4:15 p.m. on Friday

Where is it?

Jeffrey E. Riley Stadium

Can I go?

Not unless you're invited by a home or visiting player. Spectators are strictly limited.

Who are they playing?

Apponequet, which went 7-4 last season and had a chance at winning a share of the South Coast Conference Blue (large schools) crown.

So who is back for the Bears?

The first name to note is senior running back and linebacker/safety Heiser Cacho. A dynamic 5-foot-8, 165-pound athlete who can turn short yardage into big gains in the blink of an eye, Cacho combined for 675 rushing and receiving yards last year, while making 68 tackles and six sacks on defense.

Who else?

Three of last year's starting five offensive linemen return, led by senior captain Ed Fragata. He is joined by juniors Aiden Silva, Max Lague, Jack Lima and Nolan Michaud.

Alright, who are the new faces?

He's not that new, but junior Cam Lynch will take over as the full-time quarterback. Spending the last two years behind Ethan Almeida, Lynch started four games as an injury replacement as a freshman in 2018, then played mostly wide receiver last season. In his first start as a freshman, he threw for 167 yards and four scores. In his final start, a Directors Cup win over Diman, he threw two more touchdowns.

With the graduation of top receivers Sheldon Clark and Colin Wildrick, he'll often be eyeing slot receiver Kyle Langlois and senior Lucas DaCosta, as well as Cacho, who is expected to be heavily involved in the passing game in addition to running the ball.

What about the defense?

Cacho is a leader on both sides of the ball, and Fargata also anchors the defensive line, but a key will be senior Jonah Rivera's return to the linebacking corp. Rivera missed the 2019 season after tearing his ACL, but has looked good in preseason.

What happened last year against Apponequet?

The Lakers won 21-13 thanks to 176 rushing yards from senior Kevin Hughes, with rushing touchdowns from Cole Dixon and Chace Gorman, all of whom are back. Lynch played some quarterback, finishing 5-of-13 for 41 yards.

How good are the Lakers?

As good their offensive line can get, but maybe even better with the amount of talent in their backfield. Apponequet may feature the best running back room in the conference, led by Hughes, who churned up almost 1,400 yards last year, scoring 15 touchdowns and averaging more than eight yards per carry. He'll be joined by Dixon and Gorman, a former quarterback.

Quarterback Jack Mahan, a junior, returns, and so does his favorite target, tight end Mike Henricksen. That leaves the offensive line, which returns just one starter, Louis LeBate.

Defensively, the team features seven returning starters, including the linebacking corp of Hughes, Dixon and Henricksen.

What does the rest of GNB Voc-Tech's schedule look like?

Hosting Old Rochester at 4 p.m. on April 2

Vs. Fairhaven at New Bedford High at 6:30 p.m. on April 9

At Somerset Berkley at 6:30 p.m. on April 16

Hosting Dighton-Rehoboth at 6:30 p.m. April 23