

WIDE RECEIVERS

BY JOHN BORTON

WHO'S GONE

Donovan Peoples-Jones

The one they call "DPJ" left The Big House a year early. A third-team All-Big Ten honoree in 2018, Peoples-Jones finished with 34 catches for 438 yards and six touchdowns as a senior. His departure also removes the team's top punt returner, after he averaged 7.2 yards on 24 tries in 2019.

Tarik Black

Black went through two foot injuries and some dissatisfaction in his years at Michigan, the latter prompting his transfer. His redshirt sophomore campaign featured 25 catches for 323 yards and a lone TD, along with countless recitations of his untapped potential.

WHO'S BACK

Senior

Nico Collins

Collins keeps delivering on his potential, finishing second on the team in catches (37) and receiving yards (729) in 2019, and first in touchdown grabs (seven). His length and athletic ability should again make him Michigan's top downfield target in 2020, after U-M named him its Offensive Player of the Year in 2019.

Junior Ronnie Bell

Bell tolled and toiled for Michigan in a breakout season last fall, leading the Wolverines in receptions (48) and receiving yards (758). He'll likely boost his TD total (one) this season.

Sophomore Giles Jackson

Jackson came on strong for U-M in the latter portion of his true freshman year, both as a receiver and returner. He made nine catches for 142 yards with one TD grab. He also averaged 25.9 yards on 24 kick returns, with a 97-yard touchdown at Maryland.

Sophomore Mike Sainristil

Sainristil became Michigan's other compact speedster. He secured eight catches for 145 yards, averaging 18.1 yards per reception. He also secured a touchdown pass.

TOP NEWCOMER

Freshman A.J. Henning

The product of Frankfort, Ill., might be the most talked about player in Michigan's 2020 recruiting class. The 5-10, 183-pound speedster gives Gattis another turbo-charged chess piece in the offensive attack, one who scored 29 touchdowns as a prep senior.



NICO COLLINS

PHOTO BY LON HORWEDEL

Last year's spring preview spoke about one of the top wide receiver groups in the nation forming. It didn't piece together exactly as planned, but U-M's wideouts showed potential past the "big three."

That's good, because only one of those three — senior Nico Collins — remains. He's far from the Lone Ranger when it comes to receiving talent, though, with some stepping up last season and Josh Gattis continuing the influx of speed-burning talent.

In year two of Gattis' "Speed In Space" offense, there should be more of both, spread among a host of receivers.

BY THE NUMBERS

50th

Michigan's national rank in passing yards per game last season. It's a measure of how pass-happy the game has grown, since the Wolverines averaged 250.8 yards per game through the air, among its better efforts in the 2000s.

146

Receiving yards by Collins against Indiana last season, marking a career high for the lanky veteran.

3,261

Passing yards by U-M in 2019, marking its best effort in that area since 2003. That was despite U-M completing only 55.6 percent of its throws through the air as a team, one of Michigan's lower figures during that span.

131

Combined receiving yards for Bell against Ohio State and Alabama last year, meaning he played some of his best football at the end of the season versus the toughest competition. He led U-M with six catches and 78 yards against OSU.

QUOTABLE

"We're going to be faster. There's going to be a huge focus on catching the football, and we'll have great big-play ability."

— Michigan All-American
Jon Jansen

POSITION BATTLE TO WATCH

The biggest position battle here revolves around who emerges as the third receiver. Is it Jackson, Sainristil, a coup by Henning or a bigger receiver like sophomore Cornelius Johnson, who showed flashes of great talent as a true freshman last season?