

# SOUTH DAKOTA STATE JACKRABBITS

South Dakota St was a Division II program but moved up to Division I FCS in 2004 as a charter member of the Great West Football Conference then moved to the Missouri Valley Football Conference in 2008. John Stiegelmeier has been their head coach since 1997. They have a 19,340 season stadium. In 2009 they made the playoffs but lost in the first round to Montana. Three years later they made the playoffs a 2<sup>nd</sup> time and lost in the 2<sup>nd</sup> round to North Dakota St. They have now made the playoffs NINE straight years getting to the 2<sup>nd</sup> round in 2014, the first round in 2015, the Quarterfinals in 2016 then the Semifinals in both 2017 (lost to James Madison 51-16) and 2018 (lost to NDSt 44-21). In 2019 after a bye they lost to Northern Iowa in the 2<sup>nd</sup> round. Last year SDSt was the #1 seed and beat Holy Cross 31-3, Southern Illinois 31-26, Delaware 33-3 but in the National Title game lost to Sam Houston St 23-21. They are 1-9 vs FBS teams with a win over Kansas in 2015, a 3 point loss to Minnesota in 2009, 14 point loss to Nebraska in 2010, and a 7 point loss to Minnesota in 2019. The last 4 years SDSt is +52 ypg in MVFC play, +10 ypg in '18, +76 ypg in '19 and +124 ypg last year.

In 2019 3 QB's shared the job as J'Bore Gibbs missed two early games then missed the last 4 games of the season but threw for 1058 (59%, 10-4) while Keaton Heide started the last 4 and threw for 905 (71%, 6-2) and Kanin Nelson started those two early games and threw for 293 (57%, 3-0). Last year Mark Gronkowski took over as the QB and threw for 1549 (58%, 15-3) but he was injured in the title game and will be out for the year. He was also the #3 rusher with 567 (7.0!). While Heide and Gibbs do return they add in Chris Oladokun as a transfer. While at Samford Oladokun threw for 2058 (62%, 18-7) and did rush for 491 (3.9). Last year was injured in the opener (35-54-222-1-2) and only played in one more game (2 passes). While Gronkowski was a true frosh and a first time starter and this unit is actually more experienced it will be a good year if Oladokun matches the spring production. RB Pierre Strong led in 2019 with 1018 (7.1) and had 169 receiving. Mikey Daniel was #2 with 535 (4.7) and CJ Wilson was #3 with 491 (7.1). Last year they had to replace their #2 and #3 rushers (comb 1206 rush yd) and Strong led again with 650 (5.8). Isaiah David emerged and rushed for 640 and a super 7.8 ypc. This year the top 2 are back and Strong is one of the MVFC's top players. In 2019 they had to replace their top 4 receivers (combined 1967 yds) but Cade Johnson led the WR's with a super 1222 (17.0) while Adam Anderson was #2 with 474 (12.8) and Jaxon Janke was #3 with 353 (12.2). This spring they had to replace their top 2 (combined 1696 yds). Jaon Janke led with 438 (15.1) and Jadon Janke was #2 with 412 (21.7) and RB Strong was #3. TE Zach Heins was #4 with 156 (15.6, 7.3). This fall the top guys are all back and they add Patrick Huffman from Northern Illinois. In 2019 the SDSt O-line opened holes for 198 ypg rush (5.4) and allowed 30 sacks (10.2%). In the spring they only returned two full time starters but did get back Wes Genant who had 11 starts in 2018 and 3 starts til injury in '19 so basically had 3 starters back. The O-line numbers greatly improved to 232 (6.1) rush with 4.6% sacks allowed. This year all 5 starters return led by RT Garrett Greenfield, LT Aaron Johnson, LG Mason McCormick, and C Wes Genant. This is one of the top O-lines in the MVFC. Overall the offense put up 382 ypg and 27 ppg in 2019 and improved to 412 ypg iin MVFC play and 32 ppg last year. The offense returns almost in tact from the spring with the exception of QB.

In 2019 the Jackrabbits defense allowed just 306 ypg in MVFC play and 19 ppg. In the spring they had to replace their top 2 tacklers and 5 of the top 11 tacklers but did have back 9 of the top 14 tacklers including DE Reece Winkelman who tied for the lead in sacks with 6.5. They actually improved to allowing just 288 ypg and 16 ppg in MVFC play. This year they return 23 of the top 24 tacklers with the only loss being #3 tackler Preston Tetzlaff. The top players on D are LB Logan Backhaus, DL Caleb Sanders and DB Don Gardner. This should be one of the top units in the MVFC once again.

In 2019 Chase Vinatieri hit 9-18 FG with a long of 44, with Ben Dinkel avg 41.6 on punts. Jaxon Janke avg a solid 10.7 on PR's but SDSt had just 20.3 on KR's. In the spring they had a new K in Cole Frahm who did a great job hitting 13-19 FG with a long of 52. Dinkel avg 41.9 on punts. SDSt had just 5.7 on PR's but Jordan Meachum (26.5) and Isaiah Davis (32.6) did a great job on KR's. Everyone is back but Meachum so this unit will still be solid.

South Dakota St is picked to finish first in the MVFC for the first time in their school history and has 12 Super Seniors with 10 of them being starters. Even though the Jackrabbits lost the title game (QB did get injured in 2H) they finished #1 in the Average Game Grade at 82.5 after being #4 in 2019 with 78.1. The biggest question mark is QB with Gronkowski being injured and his 7.0 ypc rush will be tough to replace. They do host North Dakota St and beat them 27-17 with a 454-246 yard edge in the spring. This team is very capable of winning the MVFC and contending for their first ever national championship.