

MCNEESE STATE

McNeese ended 2017 with a 9-2 record and finished ranked #22 but missed the playoffs. In '18 the Cowboys brought back 10 starters and started the year 5-1, which included a win over eventual Southland champion Nicholls. McNeese was ranked as high as #6 but would go on to win just 1 of their final 5 games and finished 6-5. McNeese did not renew Lance Guidry's contract despite going 21-12 over his 3 seasons. The Cowboys brought in Sterlin Gilbert, who was the OC at Texas in '16 and the OC at South Florida in '17-'18. McNeese opened 3-4 but went 4-1 down the stretch to eek out a winning year at 7-5 record. Gilbert then bolted to be the OC at Syracuse so Frank Wilson stepped into a ridiculous situation of being a first year HC in a Covid year and 3rd HC in 3 years. McNeese could not even practice in the fall as they were hit by Hurricane Laura followed up by Hurricane Delats then a freak ice storm in February and with many roofs damaged as Huge rain storm. Their DC then left for the NFL after week 1! Wilson was the RB coach at LSU and then the HC at UTSA. McNeese got past Tarlton St then went 0-3 to open Southland play. They beat NWSt and upset Nicholls. They had 19-19 FD vs Sam Houston St but came up 14 points short for a 3-4 finish.

McNeese's offense has been strong for much of the decade, averaging under 400 ypg just 2 times since 2011 (398 ypg in '15, 397 ypg in '14), but in '18 despite having 7 starters back, the Cowboy offense took a tumble. After averaging 420 ypg the first 2 weeks, McNeese's offense put up just 248 ypg the next 7 weeks before gaining 318 and 305 yards in their last 2 games. In 2018 they had just 4 starters are back on offense for McNeese. QB James Tabary hit just 56% and passed for 1,576 yards (8 starts, 12-7 ratio) and departs, while backup QB Cody Orgeron (son of LSU HC Ed Orgeron) returned for the Cowboys in '19 after starting 3 games and passing for 406 yards (55.6%, 2-3 ratio) and running for 148 (3.4). Three of the top 4 RB's departed for the Cowboys including their top rusher (7 starts, 488, 4.9, 4 TD) while the top RB retuning was Justin Pratt (2 starts, 320, 3.4). In Sterling Gilberts only year as head man they improved to 383 ypg and 26 ppg. QB Cody Orgeron threw for 2628 (58%. 24-9) while Pratt led the way at RB with 704 (4.7). Last year another new offense but had to replace 3 of their top 4 WR's and top 2 RB's (704, 4.7, 533, 4.2). They improved to 401 ypg but just 26 ppg again. QB Orgeron threw for 1622 yards (61%, 10-3) and led the team in rushing (257, 2.9). Orgeron entered at 170 lbs and is up to 200 lbs and is back to lead this team. The run game has to be improved after their top RB Josh Parker had just 190 (4.1) and Deonta McMahan was #2 with 189 (5.1) and all 3 return. They add in Tulane's leading rusher last year in Stephon Huderson (773, 6.0)! They also add Arizona St transfer AJ Carter. This year 4 of the top 5 receivers are back in Josh Matthews

(458, 14.3, 2nd team preseason Southland), Mason Pierce (187, 23.4) Severyn Foster (168, 18.7) and LSU transfer Jamal Pettigrew (132, 7.3). The O-line did not have great size last year but is bigger with all 5 starters back and they add in two transfer OL and have much needed added size. With 10 starters back on offense, some solid transfers and a full spring to get incorporated this is a much improved offense.

Defense McNeese had an elite defense in '17 as they held teams to just 263 ypg and 17 ppg. Just 3 starters returned from that unit in '18, and they slipped to allowing 356 ypg & 24 ppg. The DL had to replace all 4 starters from a unit that held teams to 54 rush ypg in 2017. McNeese's run defense still held foes to 120 ypg (3.4) Since 2013, the highest completion percentage the McNeese pass defense has allowed was 51.9 percent! In '18 the Cowboys lost 4 players with starting experience, the pass numbers slipped to 56.5 completion percentage & 236 pass ypg, but that was only down from 50.8% and 208 pass ypg allowed in '17. BUCK Cory McCoy (11 starts, #3 tackler, 6 TFL, 7 PBU) was the top tackler of the unit. In '19 the defense slipped some more allowing 385 ypg and 26 ppg but did hold foes to 93 (2.7) rush, allowing 292 ypg pass (57.2%). Last year they had their worst defense in over 10 years allowing 441 ypg, 4.6 ypc rush and 55% completions along with 29 ppg. This year they lose DB Cory McCoy (#2 tklr, 2 sk), DB Ridge Texada (#10 tklr) and DB Camro Peterson (#11 tklr). They add in Kansas transfer Corione Harris (PS#42, 17 sts) at CB. On the first team preseason All Southland team are DL Isaiah Chambers, DL Mason Kinsey and DB Andre Sam and on the 2nd unit is DB Chris Joyce. Overall, 13 of the top 16 tacklers return and they are much better prepared than they were heading into last season and should be much improved.

The Cowboys lose P Bailey Raborn (38.3 avg) who had a 35.5 net and the new P is Calum Eddings. K Jacob Abel is back after hitting a solid 9-12 FG with a long of 45. Mason Pierce had just 6 yards on 7 PR's but did avg 20.9 on 13 KR's and is back. The special teams unit is underwhelming but I do like their K.

This is basically year one for Frank Wilson as HC and they are in much better shape than they were heading into the spring. They were picked 4th in the 6 team conference in the preseason but do appear to have a large upside. Only one player on the offense was selected to the preseason All Conference team and that was 2nd team but I like QB Orgeron and RB Hudderson. They signed some transfers on the O-line and are bigger in that unit. The D can only improve. This team is a bit of a wild card as they could contend for conference honors if everything comes together quickly or could end up near the bottom. Should be a fun team to watch. Their non conference game vs LSU has QB Orgeron going against his Dad and ex LSU RB Coach Wilson going vs his old team. I do look for a return to a winning season this year.

