

EAST TENNESSEE ST BUCCANEERS

POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

QUARTERBACKS - ETSU had to replace their QB in the spring of '21. Tyler Riddell started the first 3 games and threw for 575 (61%, 3-2) then Brock Landis started the last 3, throwing for 436 (50%, 2-2). Both returned last year, making the unit much more experienced. Riddell started all 13 games and threw for 2,464 (62.4%). His 19 pass td's were good for 2nd in program history and he threw just 5 int's. Landis only saw action in 2 games and threw for 73 yards on 4 of 9 passing with 1 td and 1 int. Riddell was 3rd Team All SoCon and a Frosh AA. He returns along with Landis and they add Eastern Michigan transfer Baron May. Riddell enters '22 first all-time in the program's completion percentage and could post even better numbers this year.

RUNNING BACKS - In '18 Quay Holmes rushed for 928 (4.5) then came back in '19 and rushed for 1,143 (5.5). In just 6 spring games he had 640 (5.2). Holmes returned last year and led the SoCon with 1,553 (5.9) and added 331 receiving (10.3). Jacob Saylor gave them two 1,000 yard rushers as he went for 1,019 and had their best ypc at 7.1 to go along with 143 receiving yards. Saylor set a program record with 266 rush yards vs Western Carolina. This year they lose 1st Team FCS AA Holmes but Saylor was 2nd Team AP FCS AA and he returns. No other RB topped 100 yards last year but with an All American returning they are in the same boat entering the season.

RECEIVERS - ETSU had a pair of solid TE's in Nate Adkins and Noah West who combined for 18 receptions in the spring and both were solid blockers and receivers. Atkins (1st tm Pres SoCon) had 25 receptions in 2019 but missed the first two games in spring with injury. They had to replace their top 2 WR's but they had just 342 (14.9) and 317 (10.6) in 12 games in 2019. Will Huzzie (#3 '19, 317, 10.6) was the top guy with 334 (12.4) while Julion Lane-Price was #2 with 224 (16.0). The receiving corps was more experienced and had a lot of upside. Huzzie led with 798 (13.8). Malik Murray was #2 with 381 (10.0). Adkins added 357 (10.8) and Julion Price had 253 (14.1). This year they lose Murray, Adkins (transfer to South Carolina) and Price. Huzzie was 1st Team All SoCon last year but they lose 4 of their top 5 receivers and depth is a concern. They do add Deuce Larose who had 484 (16.1) at Valpo in '19 and 159 in '20. This is their least experienced unit on offense.

OFFENSIVE LINE - The offense line paved the way for 149 ypg rush (4.1) and allowed just 6.6% sacks in the spring. All 5 starters returned up front with Tremond Shorts garnering 1st team SoCon preseason honors and Tavon Matthews on the 2nd team. ETSU experienced excellent health with all 5 starters remaining in the lineup for all 13 games. They rushed for 214 ypg (5.4) and allowed 23 sacks (6.6%). The Bucs ran for 237 ypg vs conference foes. Shorts transferred to LSU but their other 4 starters return including 2nd Team All So-Con RG Matthews. With 4 starters back this is the strongest Oline in the So-Con.

DEFENSIVE LINE - The rush D collapsed in 2019 as they gave up 221 ypg and 5.4 ypc on the ground. An emphasis was made to stop the run last year and ETSU actually led the SoCon in rush defense allowing just 115 ypg (3.0). The Bucs slipped to 154 rush ypg allowed last year but only gave up 131 ypg in the regular season. They lose DE Olajuwon Pinkelton (6 st, #12 tkl'r) and Blake Bockrath (#16 tkl'r). All 3 starters return and they get their #9, #13 and #15 tacklers back. Only 5 of their 22 sacks came from this group so they aren't overwhelming but should do better against the run.

LINEBACKERS - LB Jared Folks was an amazing story. He started at Temple in '14 but missed his first 2 years with injury. He transferred to ETSU in '18 and was 2nd Team All-SoCon, recording 80 tackles. He battled injuries in '19 then was SoCon Defensive POY in the spring, finishing with 50 tackles. Last year he returned as an 8th year Grad Senior! He was #2 with 94 tackles. Donovan Manuel finished #1 in the SoCon with 124 tackles. Both Folks and Manuel were named 1st Team All-SoCon. Folks finally departs and Manuel transferred to FIU. They do get their #7, #8, #10, #11, #14 and #17 tacklers back. Depth is solid but they are down a notch without their top 2 guys.

DEFENSIVE BACKS - ETSU returned their #2 and #4 tacklers in Alijah Huzzie and Mike Price last year. The Bucs were gashed for 582 pass yards vs Samford, 510 vs WCU and 375 vs Mercer. They allowed 229 pass ypg but 264 vs SoCon foes and were #5 in pass defense efficiency (62.9%, 17-15). This year ETSU must replace FS Tyree Robinson (13 st, #5 tkl'r, 5 int, 6 pbu) and CB Karon Delince (13 st, #6 tkl'r, 7 pd). Both Huzzie and Price return again. They were lit up by a few of the better passing teams they saw last year and their numbers were helped by facing 3 option teams so their production might not improve much.

SPECIAL TEAMS - K Tyler Keltner hit 7-10 FG in the spring with a long of 54! Naturally he was 1st team preseason SoCon. P Garrett Taylor had a 40.4 avg (4th in SoCon) and 38.4 net. Star RB Quay Holmes was the top KR (24.0) and Alijah Huzzie was the top PR (13.8). Everyone was back last year so this figured to be one of the strongest special teams units in the SoCon. Keltner made 18-23 fg's (L/51). Nate Brackett had 37 punts with a 40.3 average while Taylor only had 14 punts and a 41.8 average. Their team net fell to 37.1. Jacob Saylor had a 28.8 KR avg while Huzzie had 6.4 PR. This year they get Keltner and Brackett back. Saylor probably won't impact ST's as much now that he is their main RB but this is still one of the top ST units in the SoCon.

COACHES - Randy Sanders retired after last season. George Quarles was named as the 19th Head Coach in ETSU history. Quarles was the Associate HC and OC the last 5 seasons at Furman where he helped the Paladins lead the SoCon in scoring offense (33.5) in '19. Adam Neugebauer takes over as OC/QB Coach. He was OC at Slippery Rock for 2 seasons where they ranked in the top 10 nationally, averaging 491 ypg and 42.8 ppg over 26 games there. He was also QB Coach at Georgetown in '17-'18. He was also OC/QB Coach at DII Tiffin for 6 years. Former Buccaneer player Billy Taylor is in his 8th consecutive year as DC. He was also DC here in '02-'03 and was also DC at Tennessee Tech for 5 years prior. Daryl Dye was promoted as ST Coor in '18 and remains on the staff.

FORECAST

OFFENSE - Former Tennessee OC Randy Sanders took over in '18 and they saw immediate improvement, putting up 26 ppg and 356 ypg. In '19 they dipped to 20 ppg and 327 ypg and were virtually the same in their 6 spring games, putting up 21 ppg and 318 ypg. The spring games proved to be valuable experience as the Buccaneers. They had experience at every unit including the best RB in the SoCon in Quay Holmes. They averaged 32.7 ppg and 409 ypg and 36 ppg/444 ypg vs SoCon foes. Seven starters return. They still have a 1,000 yard rusher returning in Saylor and 4 OL starters are back so the run game will again be their strength but they also return QB Riddell and their top WR. Their new OC inherits an offense that finished #2 in scoring offense in the SoCon and they could be just as good.

DEFENSE - ETSU's defense really hit their stride in the spring season when they allowed just 19 ppg and 288 ypg. Last year they returned their star LB Jared Folks who was back for an 8th year! The Bucs had an uneven year, allowing 330 yards or less in 7 of their first 8 games but their one blemish early on was when they allowed 728 vs Samford. In their last 4 games they allowed 480 ypg. Overall they allowed 23 ppg and 383 ypg. Seven starters return. They do lose 4 of their top 6 tacklers but get 13 of their top 20 back and this should be a solid defense once again.

2022 - ETSU was in the Southern Conference but then ceased football and was dormant from the end of the 2003 season until being reinstated for the 2015 season. They opened the new William B Greene Jr Stadium in 2017. They were an Independent in '15, going 2-9 that first year. They were back in the SoCon in 2016 and went a respectable 5-6 and -150 ypg. They were 4-7 and -95 ypg in 2017. In Sanders first year they made GREAT strides, going 8-2 before dropping a game vs Samford but still made the playoffs. They lost in the first round to Jacksonville St 34-27 despite a 436-421 yard edge. Surprisingly they fell to just 2-10 in 2019, going winless in the SoCon but were just -63 ypg. Last spring they went 4-2 and were TRIChamps in the SoCon and +30 ypg. All their games were close with wins by 7, 7, 7 and 4 and losses by 4 & 8. The shared title was their first since 1969 when they were in the OVC. Last year ETSU had their first win over an FBS program since 1987 when they beat Vanderbilt 23-3. They started 6-0 before a close loss at Chattanooga. They won their last 4 regular season games to claim the outright OVC title then won their first won their first FCS playoff game since 1996 by beating Kennesaw State before losing to North Dakota St in the Quarterfinals. Their 11 wins were a program record. Head Coach Sanders retired after the season. New HC George Quarles has 14 starters back. They had +5 Net Close wins last year and were only +26 ypg (+25 in SoCon). The Buccaneers should start 4-0 before hosting Chattanooga which we think will decide the OVC. It will be tough to match last year's 11 wins and with a first year head coach we don't think they repeat as OVC champs but will finish in the top 3.