

# GRAMBLING STATE TIGERS

## POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

**QUARTERBACKS** - Jeremy Hickbottom started as a Sophomore in '18, throwing for 1,945 (56%, 16-9) and led the Tigers in rushing with 500 (4.1). In '19 he slipped to 1,804 (50%, 12-7) and added 668 (5.4) on the ground. He split time in their spring season with Elijah Walker. Hickbottom threw for 380 (65.6%, 1-2) and rushed for 58 yards (1.9). Walker added 332 passing (57.7%, 2-1). After the spring, Hickbottom transferred to Tennessee St, leaving the Tigers much less experienced at QB. Four different QB's started at least 1 game and no one topped 500 passing yards or hit 50% of their passes. Walker started the 4 including the first 2. He finished #2 with just 400 yards (47.5%, 2-2) but he did add 305 (5.1) rushing. Noah Bodden started 3 straight mid-season and led with 476 but hit just 43.1% (4-4). John-Paul Pierce started vs BC and finished #3 with 291 (42.6%, 3-3). Aldon Clark started 2 and added 195 (44.2%, 1-2) along with 175 rush (4.1). Amazingly all 4 QB's that started last year have departed. They added PS#49 UCLA transfer Kajiya Hollawayne (6'4" 210 rFr), Syracuse transfer Chance Amie (PS#56) and Quaterius Hawkins from Jones College. They are much more talented but less experienced.

**RUNNING BACKS** - GSU's top RB in '19 transferred to Southern Miss. They had to replace their top RB from their spring season as well last year. CJ Russell was their top returnee with 148 (4.4). Russell had a season high 101 in the Bayou Classic and led with 429 (3.8). Darque Brutton had 316 (3.4). No other RB topped 53 rush yards. Russell returns this year while Brutton departs. They add Jaden Handy from Ole Miss (PS#158) and Maurice Washington (PS#24) from Nebraska who rushed for 753 and had 383 receiving. They are more experienced and more talented so this is their most improved unit.

**RECEIVERS** - GSU lost their top three WRs from '19 and only one WR topped even 150 yds in spring, with Darrell Clark leading with 156 (9.2). Last year Greg White led with 514 (16.7). Kobe Ross was #2 with 248 (10.3). Clark only finished with 138 (11.5). No other WR topped 100 yards. This year the Tigers lose Ross, Clark and TE Dorrell James (10 st, 97, 10.8). White returns but with 3 of their top 4 gone they are less experienced. They added Utah transfer true frosh Ryan Peppins (PS#112), Oregon transfer Ja'ron Waters (PS#117) and TCU transfer Micah White. None of the transfers have any experience so this is a very young unit.

**OFFENSIVE LINE** - In '19 Grambling rushed for 212 ypg (5.1) with 24 sacks (6.9%). The offensive line struggled to protect the QB in spring ball, allowing 18 sacks and an untenable sack rate of 15.8%! They only rushed for 129 (3.2). Last year all 5 starters from spring returned. They improved their pass pro, allowing 23 sacks (7.8%) but only rushed for 114 (3.5). This year the Tigers lose 3 starters and 2 backups. Gone are LG Errol Walker (11 st), C Kyle Davis (11 st), and RG Jordan Ighofose (7 st). The only OL with starting experience are LT Chris Chernak (11 st) and RT/RG Tyler Thomas (11 st). They did add a slew of JUCO's but this is a young OLine that will go through some growing pains.

**DEFENSIVE LINE** - The DL posted a sack rate of 7.6% in '19, which sank to 4.1% in '20-'21 after losing their top two sack leaders from '19 (13.5). Grambling did have four starters back along the DLine but allowed 184 ypg rushing on 4.4 ypc in spring. Last year they were basically the same, allowing 174 rush ypg and 4.4 ypc. They did improve to 27 sacks and 8.4%. Sundiata Anderson led with 5.5 sacks and was their #7 tk/r. This year they get 7 of their top 8 back, only losing Martav Dotson (5 st, #13 tk/r, 3 tfl). They have their #6, #11, #13, #17 and #20 tacklers back so this group is much more experienced and should improve on the last two year's rush stats.

**LINEBACKERS** - GSU lost all 3 starters including their leading tackler heading into spring. Lewis Matthews led in spring with 26 tackles in 4 games. The entire LB corps from spring returned for the fall. Joshua Reed and Blake Thomas tied for the lead with 48 tackles. Both return along with Matthews (#7 tk/r) and 4th Tm All SWAC LB Bryan Powell (11 st, #5 tk/r) who led with 12 tfl's. Grambling also added LSU transfer Donte Starks (PS#26) and Arizona transfer Jabar Triplett (PS#160). They go from a weakness to the strongest unit on the defense.

**DEFENSIVE BACKS** - The secondary lost a key piece in Joe McWilliams headed into last spring, who had a team-high six int's for 243 yds and was second with five PBUs. Jr. Devanir Martin had six PBUs and three INTS in '19 and finished tied for the team-high with four PBUs in spring. Jr. Kenan Fontenot was second on GSU with 26 tackles and finished with four PBUs and one INT last past spring. The Tigers allowed 258 pass ypg in spring and finished last in the SWAC in pass defense efficiency (61.9%, 9-2). Their secondary returned mostly in-tact in the fall and they allowed 198 pass ypg (57.2%, 18-10) and jumped to 5th in the pass D efficiency rankings. This year they lose S Fontenot (10 st, #3 tk/r, 4 pd), CB Martin (11 st, #8 tk/r, 6 pd). They get their #4, #9, #10, #14, #16, #18 and #19 tacklers back. Two starters return and they add Alcorn St transfer CB Chris Daigre (7 st, #17 tk/r, 10 pbu), Arkansas transfer Devin Bush (PS#33) and SC State transfer Jaydon Brunson (20 tk LY). The transfers make up for the lost experience so this unit should match last year's group.

**SPECIAL TEAMS** - Garrett Urban was 4-8 on fg's from '19 and spring. He also averaged 36.9 on punts. Urban was much better in the fall, hitting 15-17 fg's (L/45) while his ypg did fall to 36.0 (32.0 net). This year Urban returns and if he matches last year's form then this is an above average unit. They do need to get more from their return men who averaged just 5.9 PR and 17.2 KR.

**COACHES** - Former NFL Head Coach Hugh Jackson takes over. He was the OC/QB Coach at Tennessee State last year. Jackson was Head Coach of the Cleveland Browns from '16-'18 and OC of the Cincy Bengals in '14-'15. He was also the Head Coach of the Oakland Raiders in '11 and OC there in '10. He was a college OC at USC ('97-'00) and Cal ('96). Jackson hired John Simon as his OC. Simon was the Pass Game Coor/WR Coach at Memphis from '19-'21. He was RB Coach at Arizona St as well. Former Alcorn St DC Cedric Thornton was brought in to head the defense. Thornton ran the Braves D from '18-'21 and Coached LB's the 2 years prior. He was also the DC at Alabama St. They do not have a designated ST's Coordinator.

## FORECAST

**OFFENSE** - Grambling averaged 30 ppg and 411 ypg in '19. They put up 34 ppg and 407 ypg against SWAC foes. They were young at WR and OL in the spring and fell to just 17 ppg and 327 ypg. Last year Grambling had to replace their 3 year starting QB. They were shutout in back-to-back games vs FBS foes SMiss and Houston and didn't top 16 points until their 5th game when they put up 37 points vs Alabama A&M but only had 275 yards. The Tigers averaged 17 ppg and ypg dropped just to just 238. They did end the season on a high note, putting up 500 yards in the Bayou Classic after not hitting 300 yards once in the previous 10 games. This year they hired former NFL Head Coach and OC/QB Coach Hugh Jackson to revitalize the offense. Their 4 QB's who started last year departed but they brought in two more talented but inexperienced Power 5 transfers. Their WR's and Oline are in experienced but they do get their #1 WR back and added transfers there as well. Jackson will make an immediate impact on this offense so we expect at least a touchdown increase in their ppg.

**DEFENSE** - In '19 Grambling allowed 397 ypg but only 22 ppg. They were lit up in the spring when they allowed 37 ppg and 441 ypg. In the fall they returned nearly their entire defense. The Tigers allowed 27.6 ppg and 372 ypg and they held their foes 2 ypg below their season average. This year Grambling returns 9 starters. They get 6 of their top 7 tacklers back and 17 of their top 20 tacklers return. DC Thornton is a veteran in the SWAC so this veteran group is in good hands.

**2022** - Broderick Fobbs was hired in '14 and led Grambling to back-to-back SWAC Titles. They won 12 games including the Celebration Bowl '16 then 11 in '17. The Tigers had won 3 straight SWAC Titles. They slipped to 6-5 in '18 and were -9 ypg. In '19 they started 0-4 then won 6 straight but lost the Bayou Classic 30-28 and they finished +14 ypg and +21 ypg in SWAC play. They went 0-4 in the spring, were outscored by 20 ppg and were -115 ypg. Last year they had their 3 year starting QB transfer to their season opening opponent, Tennessee St. They managed to win that game but started 1-3 with back-to-back shutouts vs FBS foes and a 14 point loss to eventual SWAC West Champs Prairie View A&M. They beat Alabama A&M by 9 despite getting outgained 477-275 (+4 TO's), trailed Alcorn St 24-6 but only lost by 4 then beat Texas Southern by 14 despite getting outgained 362-246. The Tigers lost their next 3 and Fobbs was let go with 2 games left. They did beat Southern in the Bayou Classic 29-26 which was the only game they finished with a positive yardage edge. Former NFL Head Coach Hugh Jackson steps in and they get 13 starters back. They added Power 5 talent at multiple spots including QB. Grambling opens with Ark St then hosts NW State. They draw the top 3 teams out of the SWAC East. Their two most winnable SWAC games (vs BC & Tx Southern) are both on the road. Last year they were fortunate to even finish 4-7 considering they were -135 ypg. The schedule doesn't favor them to top last year's win total but Jackson has sparked excitement and they could pull some upsets.