

JACKSON ST TIGERS

POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

QUARTERBACKS - JSU had to replace their starting QB in spring of '21 and Jalon Jones stepped in admirably, hitting 56% (12-3) for 1,040 yards while also rushing for 248 (3.9). Quincy Casey started the finale and threw for 323 and finished with 441 (63%, 4-0). Both Jones and Casey departed last year, leaving the Tigers completely inexperienced at QB. Coach Prime brought in his son, true frosh Shedeur Sanders who was the highest rated recruit in school history at the time (PS#23). Sanders lived up to the billing. He topped 300 yards 3 times including a season high 362 vs Tenn St. Sanders threw for 3,231 (65.9%, 30-8) and was named the FCS National Frosh POY and SWAC Frosh POY. Kare' Lyles was the only other QB to play and had 4 attempts. Sanders returns and they have 3 others who have played for FBS programs so depth is improved. Sanders is an elite talent and with a better Oline protecting him, he should put up even better numbers.

RUNNING BACKS - JSU lost their top 2 rushers going into spring. Tyson Alexander had 278 (5.1) in '19 then led with 377 (6.1) in spring. Last year they lost their #3 rusher (192, 4.1) but Alexander returned. Peyton Pickett had 107 vs Prairie View A&M and led with 450. Santee Marshall had 449 and JD Martin added 227. All 3 finished with 4.2 ypc. Their top 2 are gone this year in Pickett and Marshall. Alexander returned to the team so they lose their top 2 rushers bring bring back their top rusher from 2 years ago who had a much better ypc, making this an improved unit.

RECEIVERS - The WR unit needed completely rebuilt in spring with their top 5 all gone. Daylan Baldwin led with 520 (20.8) and Louisville transfer Corey Reed was #2 with 325 (12.0). JSU lost Baldwin in the fall but returned their next four leading receivers and added Houston transfer Keith Corbin (PS#140) who had 1,467 (15.6) in 5 years at Houston then Tennessee transfer Malachi Wideman (PS#33) was added late. Corbin led with 921 (13.4). Wideman had just 2 catches in the first 5 games but still finished #2 with 540 (15.9) and a team high 12 td catches. Trevonte Rucker was #3 with 515 (19.8). Warren Newman added 346 (7.2) and Josh Lanier had 318 (8.6). Corbin, Newman and Lanier all depart but Coach Prime brought in a new set of Power 5 transfer WR's in Cameron Buckley from Indiana (PS#50) who had 474 (13.9) while at A&M in '18, Mark Pope (PS#22) from Miami who had 669 (13.1) in '19-'20 and Rico Powers from (PS#45) South Carolina. The Tigers also signed PS#2 true frosh Kevin Coleman. Wideman should have a huge year and this unit is loaded with talent.

OFFENSIVE LINE - JSU avg'd 168 rush ypg (4.6) and dropped their sk % from 10.9 in '19 to just 4.7% in spring. The OL returned four starters from spring and but surprisingly fell to just 89 rush ypg (3.0) and sacks jumped back up to 36 and 8.6%. This year they lose RT Cedric Dunbar and 2 backups. Four starters return including 3rd Tm All SWAC LT Tony Gray (PS#22, from UCF/Ole Miss). They added 3 FBS transfers including Simi Moala who had 18 starts at Utah and was Honorable Mention All-Pac 12 in '18. They also added a PS#49 JUCO (orig Cal). This unit needs to make a big improvement but they certainly have the talent to do so.

DEFENSIVE LINE - Jackson St allowed 207 rush ypg (5.1, 27 sk) in '19. They improved to 158 (4.1) in spring while sack percentage dropped from 8.5 to 7.5%. Last year the Tigers returned 2 of their top 3 DL. They added DE James Houston who had 103 tackles in 3 years for the Florida Gators. JSU allowed just 100 rush ypg (2.8) and sacks doubled from their '19 total with 54! Houston led the way with 16.5 sacks and was a 2nd Team FCS All-American. This year they lose Houston (#3 tkl'r, #6DC DET), DT Antwan Owens (#4 tkl'r, 6 sk, 12.5 tfl), DT Coynis Miller (#13 tkl'r, 5 tfl) and Jaumonie Crain (10 tkl). They get their #9, #10, #15 and #16 tacklers back. It will be tough to match the production Houston gave them but they did add transfers Antonio Doyle (PS#28, A&M, 17 tkl 2Y), Jason Mercier (PS#162, FIU, 51 tkl 3Y), Michael Pleas (PS#193, SMiss, 35 tkl 2Y), Josh Griffis (PS#86, FSU, 4 tkl LY) and True Thompson (PS#87, FSU, 23 tkl 3Y). Despite the losses, this unit is actually more talented and deeper than last year.

LINEBACKERS - Last year JSU returned 3 of their top 4 tacklers including former Missouri LB Aubrey Miller and spring's top tackler Keonte Hampton. Miller led the SWAC with 109 tackles. Hampton had 79. This year Miller returns but Hampton departs along with NB CJ Holmes (#7 tkl'r, 8 pd). They add Middle Tenn transfer Jurriente Davis (12 st, 68 tkl LY) and Nyles Gaddy (orig Tenn) moves in from DE where he had 34 tackles and 4 sacks last year. Depth is a concern with only 7 LB's on the roster and they lose 2 of their top 3.

DEFENSIVE BACKS - JSU allowed 221 pass ypg and 60% in spring of '21. Last year they lost 4 of their top 6 but Coach Prime added his son Shiloh Sanders (PS#256) who started 4 games in '20 for South Carolina and John Huggins (PS#206) from Florida. JSU allowed just 157 pass ypg and 48.1% (14-13), easily finishing #1 in the SWAC in pass D efficiency. This year they lose CB Al Young (#11 tkl'r, 11 pbu, 2 int) and Randall Haynie (7 tkl, 3 pd). Huggins (#6 tkl'r, 7 pd) and Sanders (#8 tkl'r, 4 int) both return after All-SWAC seasons. They added 1st Tm All CUSA CB Greg Grate who had 206 tackles in 3 years at Middle Tenn. They also made a huge splash when PS#1DB Travis Hunter chose JSU on signing day (orig FSU commit). This is the strength of the D but the CB's are inexperienced.

SPECIAL TEAMS - Last year JSU had two kickers combine for just 4 of 12 (L/41). P Lane McGregor had a 34.8 average (32.1 team net). FSU transfer Isaiah Bolden averaged 36.9 on KR (2 td's) and Warren Newman had a 16.4 PR avg (1 td). They return McGregor and Bolden but didn't add a kicker so this unit is average at best.

COACHES - When Deion Sanders (otherwise known as Coach Prime) was hired, some questioned his lack of experience, but he did have 10 years of successful experience at Trinity Christian School in Texas and a Hall of Fame NFL career in his past. He immediately improved recruiting and put Jackson State in the eyes of the National Media. Tim Brewster was named as the Special Asst to the Head Coach. He was the TE Coach at Florida where he helped develop Kyle Pitts. He was also the Head Coach at Minnesota from '07-'10. The OC is Brett Bartalone. He was an analyst and Asst QB Coach at Nevada in '20 and was a 3Y OC at DIII Carleton College. Former NFL DC Dennis Thurman was hired in '20. He was DC for the Buffalo Bills ('15-'16) and NY Jets ('08-'14). The 3rd year ST Coordinator is Alan Ricard.

FORECAST

OFFENSE - Jackson St hit rock bottom in '17 when they put up just 13 ppg and 231 ypg. In '18 JSU they improved but still only put up 17 ppg and 277 ypg. They made a solid jump in '19, putting up 26 ppg and 387 ypg. Deion Sanders was hired in spring of '21 and they put up 36 ppg and 414 ypg in 6 games. Last year they brought in true frosh QB Shedeur Sanders and a corps of FBS transfer WR's. The Tigers put up 29 ppg and 350 ypg. This year they return 6 starters and add another crop of FBS transfers at WR. Their top rusher from the spring season returned and they have 4 starters back on the OL. Sanders goes from an inexperienced true frosh to a veteran with 12 starts under his belt, playing with a loaded cast so we think they make another solid jump.

DEFENSE - In '19 Jackson St allowed 36 ppg and 410 ypg. They hired from NFL DC Dennis Thurman in spring of '21 and they improved by more than a td per game, allowing 26 ppg and 378 ypg. Last year they made key additions at DE, DT and Safety. The results were staggering as they allowed just 14.9 ppg and 257 ypg. They even held their FBS foe, ULM to 12 points and 250 yards. Their defense was #2 in the FCS, holding foes 120 ypg below their season average. Only 4 starters return this year but they do get 6 of their top 10 tacklers back and of course Coach Prime added talent in the Portal, plus he signed a PS#1 true frosh DB! It will be difficult to top last year's defense but this group may actually be more talented.

2022 - Jackson St went 6 straight seasons without finishing above .500 from '14-'19. Their last winning season was in '13 when they went 8-4 and lost the SWAC Title game to Southern in 2OT. In '19 JSU lost their last 3 games to finish 4-8 and were -22 ypg. It was actually in September of that season that JSU announced the hiring of Deion Sanders to replace John Hendrick. JSU played 6 games in the spring of '21, winning their first 3 over a DII school and two winless opponents. They lost their last 3 to finish 3-3 and were +36 ypg. Coach Prime made significant progress in his first full season as head coach. After a 2-0 start they led FBS ULM 7-6 late 4Q before giving up the GW td with 2:24 left. JSU won their next 9 games, earning a SWAC Title by beating Prairie View A&M 27-10 but lost their first ever trip to the Celebration Bowl, 31-10 vs South Carolina St. JSU finished +94 ypg and +97 ypg vs SWAC foes. This year they only have 10 starters back but Sanders has made splash after splash, bringing in Power 5 transfers and beating out the blue bloods of college football for a PS#1DB and a PS#2WR. Sanders seems genuine in his desire to develop the HBCU football programs and has already had success so we see no reason to think this year will be any different so the Tigers are our pick to reach the SWAC Title game and head back to the Celebration Bowl.