

KENNESAW STATE

POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

QUARTERBACKS - Jonathan Murphy led KSU in the spring '21 season with 275 pass yards (54%, 3-1) and also ran for 174 yards (3.2). Tommy Bryant also saw snaps at QB and was just 4-7 for 104 yards and he ran for 162 yards (3.4, 5 td). Last fall Bryant was gone, but Murphy was back however the new starting QB was JUCO Xavier Shepherd. Last fall Shepherd started every game and finished with 1,341 pass yards (62.6%, 15-3) and also ran for 867 yards (3.6) with 23 rushing td's! Murphy went 12-26 passing (46%, 265, 3-1) and also ran for 359 yards (5.6). Shepherd (1st Tm Big South) returns this season along with Murphy and the Owls QB room is in great shape entering 2022!

RUNNING BACKS - In the spring of '21 Kyle Glover would lead the Owls with 278 rush yards (5.2) while Isaac Foster was #2 with 229 (7.6). Last fall Glover returned and was the #2 rusher (QB Shepherd #1) with 655 rush yards (4.9). Iaan Cousin ran for 479 (10.2!) and was the #1 receiver with 337 yards (24.1) while Adeolu Adeleke finished with 377 rush (7.1) and had 223 rec yards (15.9). Nykeem Farrow was the #5 rusher (QB Murphy #4) with 323 rush (7.9). While Glover (13 st, 3rd Tm Big South) departs along with Adeleke (7 st), the Owls get back Cousin (4 st, 2nd Tm Big South), Farrow (100 rec yards) and Preston Daniels (301, 4.2). While this unit loses two talented runners, the Owls return 5 RB's who had double-digit rush attempts and the depth remains in decent shape.

RECEIVERS - With KSU's offensive strategy focused on running the ball, this receiving unit does not garner all that much attention. In 2019 KSU passed the ball on just 13% of plays and in the spring of '21 they passed only 36 of their 320 plays (89% rushing plays). Last fall KSU passed on just 17% Caleb O'Neal was the leading WR with 323 yards (13 st, 17.0, 5 td). Two other WR's topped 100 yards last fall in Will Haigler (10 st, 158, 14.4) and Xavier Hill (2 st, 152, 16.9). Only 4 WR's last season caught a pass and 2 of them return this fall with the losses being O'Neal and Haigler. QB Shepherd was effective as a thrower when KSU did pass, and this unit should make the most of their limited opportunities this season.

OFFENSIVE LINE - KSU's OLine paved the way for 341 rush ypg (6.3!) in 2019 and they gave up 9 sacks (7.7%). Last spring the Owls ran for 268 rush ypg (4.7) but they gave up 8 sacks in 36 pass attempts (22.2%!). In the fall of 2021 the KSU OLine returned 3 starters and had an impressive season as they paved the way for 279 rush ypg (5.0) and they allowed just 6 sacks (4%). This season KSU loses a pair of starters along the OLine in 1st Tm Big South LT Jake Lassiter and 1st Tm Big South C William Nana Fabu. The Owls do get back 2nd Tm Big South RG Zion Katina, 3rd Tm Big South OL's Matt Olson and Terrell Paxton. The Owls still have experience back on the OLine and they had a good running back room & we expect KSU to be at or near the top of the FCS for rushing yards this season despite losing two 1st Tm OL.

DEFENSIVE LINE - Last spring the Owls DLine allowed just 114 rush ypg (3.5) and collected 13 sacks in just 5 games (9.3%). Coming into last fall the top 6 DL's were all back, giving this unit a lot of experience. The Owls gave up just 106 rush ypg (3.8) and collected 24 sacks (6.1%). DE Kerick Reese led the KSU DLine last fall as he recorded 39 tackles (8 st, 4.5 sk, 4.5 tfl) and was 4th Tm Big South. DT Travis Bell (10 st, 25 tkl, 4 sk, 3rd Tm Big South) and NT Desmond Scott (13 st, 22 tkl, 2.5 tfl) both had solid seasons. This season Reese, Bell, and Scott all return this season along with Carlos Allen (14 tkl, 3 tfl), Jahon Myers (12 tkl, 2.5 tfl) and Joel Parker (8 st, 12 tkl, 4 sk). Overall 8 of the top 9 DL's return this season and the KSU DLine is in prime position to have another superb season.

LINEBACKERS - Going into the fall of '21 the Owls lost their top two starting LB's, so this was an area KSU needed some new talent to step up. Evan Thompson led the Owls in tackles last fall with 117 tackles (12 st, 12 tfl, 4 pbu) and was 1st Tm Big South. Chance Bates was the #2 tackler (48 tkl, 1 int) and Garland Benyard had 35 tackles (L/7 st, 35 tkl, 3 tfl). The defense overall gave up just 312 ypg and 19 ppg. Coming into the fall of '22 Thompson and Bates are both gone along with Xavier Reddick (4 st, 35 tkl, 2 tfl). Benyard is the lone starter back from this unit, so this unit could struggle a bit early on while the new starters get experience, but they have a stout DLine in front of them.

DEFENSIVE BACKS - In the spring of '21 KSU's pass defense gave up 160 ypg and allowed opposing QB's to hit 61% of their passes. This unit returned pretty much intact last fall and the pass ypg did go up to 206 ypg and they again allowed 61% passes to opposing QB's. Overall they collected 11 int's. The Owls secondary was led by S's Cole Loden (11 st, 44 tkl, 4 pbu) and Java'n Singletary (10 st, 36 tkl, 2 pbu). Both S's depart this season for the Owls, but they return CB's Je'Cory Burks (13 st, 30 tkl, 5 pbu) and Erwin Byrd (11 st, 29 tkl, 4 pbu, 2 pbu) and S Markeith Montgomery (5 st, 35 tkl, 2 int) is also back. With a trio of players back in the secondary with start experience the Owls should have a good year against the pass.

SPECIAL TEAMS - In the spring of 2021 K Nathan Robertson was on 5-7 fg's (L/44) and P Nicholas Jones averaged just 36.2 yds per punt with a net of 35.6 yds. Last fall Robertson returned and connected on 10-13 fg's including 6-7 fg's from 40+ yds (L/48) and was 1st Tm Big South. The new P last season was Ben Moran and he averaged 37.7 yds per punt. In the spring of '21 RB Foster recorded 208 KR yds (23.1) and KSU recorded just 40 total PR yds. Last fall RB Gabriel Benyard was the main returner and recorded 368 KR yds (26.3) and 71 PR yds (35.5, 1 td). This season K Robertson returns again along with KR/PR Benyard, but the Owls will need a new punter to emerge this fall.

COACHES - Brian Bohannon has been the HC at Kennesaw St since the program began. Entering his 8th season here Bohannon has never had a losing record (63-18) and is 28-8 in conference play. KSU has been to the FCS playoffs 4 times, twice making it to the quarterfinals. Prior to KSU Bohannon was the QB/RB coach at Georgia Tech from 2008-2012 and was the WR coach at Navy from 2002-2007. Bohannon brought the option attack to KSU and the Owls have had great success with it over the years. Grant Chesnut has been the OC at KSU since the program began. Prior to coming to KSU

Chesnut was a high school HC at Central HS and in 2013 helped guide them to the playoffs for the first time in 10 years. Danny Verpaele enters year four at KSU and enters his 3rd season as the DC. Before coming to KSU Verpaele was the DC at Valdosta St from 2016-18 and helped guide them to a D-II national title. Ossie Buchannon enters year six as the WR coach at KSU but will add the role of ST coordinator this season.

FORECAST

OFFENSE - KSU's offense is an option-based attack that has seen great success and have been held to under 200 rush yards just NINE times since the program began playing football. In 2017 the offense ran for 330 ypg (5.7) and overall gained 435 ypg and 30 ppg. In '18 the rush numbers went up to 353 ypg (6.0) and overall averaged 454 ypg and 43 ppg! The Owls ran for 341 ypg (6.3) in 2019 and overall gained 421 ypg and 38 ppg! In the spring of '21 KSU "only" ran for 268 ypg and overall gained just 357 ypg and 30 ppg. Last fall the rushing numbers went up to 279 ypg (5.0) and the offense averaged 402 ypg and 33 ppg. This season the Owls get back Big South OPOY QB Shepherd and return 3 OLine starters, but lose 2 of their top 3 rushers and their top 2 WR's. However, the Owls have a strong rushing attack every year and 2022 should be no different. However, the changes to ban cut-blocking outside of the tackle box could impact their option attack.

DEFENSE - While KSU's option offense gets a lot of the attention, the Owls have had good defensive units over the years. In 2017 KSU allowed just 301 ypg and 16 ppg and they were +23 TO's! In 2018 the Owls allowed just 264 ypg and 15 ppg and they held foes to 119 ypg below their season average (#2 FCS!). In 2019 the defense was strong again as they gave up just 279 ypg and 19 ppg and held foes to 55 ypg below their season average. In the spring of '21 the Owls allowed 282 ypg and 18 ppg. Last fall KSU's defense gave up just 312 ypg and 19 ppg and held foes to 72 ypg below their season average. Coming into '22 KSU loses 4 of their top 5 tacklers but overall has 7 starters returning and the Owls should have another stout defense taking the field in 2022.

2022 - Though KSU only started playing football in 2015, they have seen quite a bit of success. KSU has won the Big South 3 times and have made the FCS playoffs 4 times, twice advancing to the quarterfinals. The Owls went 24-2 in Big South games dating back to 2017, but now move on to the Atlantic Sun. KSU begins the season at Samford and then at Cincinnati. Their home opener is vs Wofford and then their first ASUN game is at Jacksonville St. KSU has 4 straight home games to close out October against Nala, C. Ark, Tenn Tech, and Char Southern. They close the season at defending OVC champ UT Martin, then host Austin Peay and play at ECU. The Owls have the talent on both sides of the ball to win the ASUN this season.