

McNEESE

POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

QUARTERBACKS - QB Cody Orgeron (son of former LSU HC Ed Orgeron) returned for the Cowboys in '19 and would start all 12 games, throwing for 2,628 yards (58%, 24-9) while running for 482 yards (3.1). In the 2021 spring season Orgeron started all 7 games and collected 1,560 pass yards (61%, 10-3) and was the leading rusher with 257 rush yards (2.9). Orgeron was back in the fall of '21 and started in all 11 games and passed for 2,088 yards (58.6%, 14-3) and was the #3 rusher (340, 2.3). This season the Cowboys lose their multi-year starter at QB and don't have much experience left in the QB room. They add Georgia Southern transfer Cam Ransom (2 st LY) and Knox Kadum, Cameron McCalister and Ryan Roberts will all be in the mix. Having to find a new QB under a 1st year HC isn't an ideal situation and this unit may struggle to get going early on this season.

RUNNING BACKS - 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 returning in 2019 was Justin Pratt (2 starts, 320, 3.4). Pratt was the #1 rusher in '19 (704, 4.7) while Elijah Mack was #2 (533, 4.2). The top 2 RB's were both gone in the spring of '21 and QB Orgeron was the top rusher, but the #1 RB was Deonta McMahon (189, 5.1) and Carlo Williams was the #2 RB (187, 4.9). Last fall the top 3 RB's were all back and McMahon again was the top RB (3 st, 558, 5.1, 8 td) and was 2nd Tm Southland. Stephon Hunderson (Tulane transfer) was the #2 RB (6 st, 419, 4.1). Orgeron was the #3 rusher and Josh Parker was #4 (209, 4.0). This season both McMahon and Parker are back, and Hunderson along with C. Williams (160, 5.0). With the #1 and #3 rushers returning & the addition of Marcus McElroy (Colorado St) and Mekhai Johnson (Marist) this unit looks to be in good shape entering 2022.

RECEIVERS - Going into the spring of 2021 this unit lost all 4 receivers that topped 200 yards in 2019 including the top guy (950, 14.2, 9 td). Last fall 4 of the top 5 receivers were back in Josh Matthews (458, 14.3), Mason Pierce (187, 23.4), Severyn Foster (168, 18.7) and LSU transfer Jamal Pettigrew (132, 7.3). Last fall Matthews would lead the unit with 463 yards (12.9), Pierce was #2 (362, 12.1, 5 td), and QB Walker Wood was actually the #4 receiver (224, 14.0). While the QB situation is far from ideal going into 2022, this unit the top 6 receivers are all back, with the biggest lost being CeeJay Powell (176, 12.6). We like the experience this unit brings into the season, but with the QB situation still getting figured out our overall expectations for this group are limited.

OFFENSIVE LINE - The OLine did not have great size in the spring of 2021 but they paved the way for 169 rush ypg (4.0), but allowed 21 sacks in 7 games (10.8%)! This unit was bigger with all 5 starters back in the fall and they added two transfer OL and had much-needed added size. However the rushing yards took a bit of a hit, dropping to 155 ypg (3.7) and they gave up 43 sacks (13.8%) with 11 coming in the finale vs Northwestern St! This season McNeese returns 5 players who started a game last season, with 4 of them being starters led by 1st Tm Southland LG Caron Coleman and 4th Tm Southland C Calvin Barkat. With 4 starters back and a normal offseason to regroup and improve, we expect the rushing numbers to be solid and they should be better at protecting the QB.

DEFENSIVE LINE - The rush defense for McNeese in 2019 was elite, as they held foes to 93 rush ypg (2.7) and collected 33 sacks (7.0%). In the spring of '21 the Cowboys run defense slipped big and allowed 185 rush ypg (4.6), but did collect 25 sacks in 7 games (9.7%). This unit was experienced coming into last fall and they showed improvement, holding 4 foes to under 100 rush yds and overall allowing 111 rush ypg (3.4) and they recorded 33 sacks (8.3%) with 10 sacks coming in their home meeting against Incarnate Word. This unit was led by 1st Tm Southland DE's Isaiah Chambers (11 st, 59 tkl, 10.5 sk, 5 tfl, 3 pbu) and Mason Kinsey (11 st, 41 tkl, 6.5 sk, 2 pbu). Kinsey returns this season along with DT's Masry Mapieu (L/4 st, 21 tkl), Accord Green (9 st, 17 tkl, 4.5 tfl) and Joey McNeely (F/7 st, 13 tkl, 2 sk). Chambers, who was 1st Tm AA, is the lone starter gone. While this unit has a lot of experience back, replacing a talent like Chambers will be tough to do.

LINEBACKERS - The Cowboys defense, allowed 441 ypg and 29 ppg in the spring season of 2021. McNeese's LB corps returned basically intact last fall and the numbers improved to 376 ypg and 25 ppg allowed. Kordell Williams led McNeese with 100 tackles (11 st, 5 tfl, 3 sk, 1 int) and was 1st Tm Southland. Darius Daniels (55 tkl, 2 tfl) started the F/8 games (missed L/2 gms) and Brayden Adams started the L/3 games (16 tkl). The starting NB was Corione Harris & ended last fall with 52 tkl (11 st, 2 sk, 6 pbu). Williams & Adams return this season, but they lose Daniels and NB Harris along with backup Kobe Callahan (12 tkl, 2 tfl). Having Williams back is a plus, but Adams will have to fill the void of the other LB spot and a new NB will have to emerge if the Cowboys defense is to remain strong this season.

DEFENSIVE BACKS - In 2019 McNeese's pass defense gave up 300+ pass yds 7 times & for the season allowed 292 pass ypg, but just 57% completions and they collected 12 int's. Last spring McNeese gave up 300+ pass yds in 3 of their 7 gms & overall allowed 257 pass ypg (55%) and picked off 7 passes. Last fall the Cowboys pass defense gave up 305 ypg (61%) in the F/7 games, but in the L/4 games improved to 196 ypg (55%). For the season they gave up 265 pass ypg (59%) and again picked off 12 passes. Andre Sam was again the leader of the secondary (11 st, 70 tkl, 7 pbu) and was 2nd Tm Southland. Jarrius Wallace started the L/6 games at S and finished with 32 tackles (1.5 tfl, 3 int) and was 3rd Tm Southland. This season both Sam and Wallace are gone along with CB's Colby Richardson (11 st, 22 tkl, 3 pbu, 2 int) and Chris Joyce (9 st, 22 tkl, 5 pbu). They bring back S Enos Lewis (4 st, 31 tkl) and CB's Alijah Hamilton (18 tkl, 4 pbu) and Rae'kwon Starks (2 st, 9 tkl, 2 pbu). There is still some experience returning, but losing 4 starters from last year likely means this unit is taking a step back this season.

SPECIAL TEAMS - Jacob Abel hit 9-12 fg's (L/45) in the spring of '21, while P Bailey Raborn averaged 38.3 yds per punt (L/62) with an net of 35.5 yds. Abel was back LY, but 4 different players attempted a fg last season and overall went 5-11 on fg's with no one making a fg longer than 32 yds. The new P was Callum Eddings and he averaged just 36.5 yds per punt (L/55) and the team net was 33.8 yds. WR Pierce was the main returner & recorded 548 KR yds (24.9, 1 td) and 134 PR yds (9.6). Eddings and Pierce return this season, but a new K must emerge if this unit is to have any increased success in 2022.

COACHES - McNeese hired Sterlin Gilbert in 2019 to be the next HC, but he only spent 1 season there before leaving to be the OC at Syracuse. Former UTSA HC (2016-19) Frank Wilson took over as the HC and spent the spring and fall seasons in 2021 here, but is now the RB coach at LSU. The new HC

here is Gary Goff, and he spent the 2019-2021 at D-II Valdosta St as the HC and he led them to the D-II national title game last season. Goff was also the HC at D-II Tiffin in Ohio from 2011-18. McNeese doesn't list an OC, but HC Goff will likely be the play-caller. Tony Pecorano is the new DC for McNeese. In 2021 Pecorano was a quality control analyst and prior to that was an assistant coach at Southern Miss in 2020 and a quality control analyst at Kansas in 2019. Frank Wilson Jr is the Special Teams Coordinator.

FORECAST

OFFENSE - In 2017 McNeese's offense put up 408 ypg and scored 30 ppg. In '18 despite having 7 starters back, the Cowboy offense took a tumble as they averaged just 291 ypg and 21 ppg & their offense was held to 144 ypg less than what their foes allow. In 2019 they had just 4 starters are back on offense, but gained 383 ypg and scored 26 ppg. Despite having a new HC and playing in the spring McNeese did put up 401 ypg, but again scored 26 ppg. Last fall 10 starters were back on offense but in the F/3 games vs FBS/FCS foes they gained just 232 ypg & scored only 13 ppg. Over the L/7 games the offensive numbers improved to 378 ypg and 28 ppg. Overall they put up 348 ypg/25 ppg. This season they do lose their starting QB, but 4 OLine starters are back and the top 6 receivers return, so if they find a solid replacement at QB this unit will be in pretty good shape entering 2022.

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, but the defense held foes to 62 yds below their season average. In '19 the defense slipped some more allowing 385 ypg and 26 ppg, but did hold foes to 93 rush ypg (2.7), allowing 292 pass ypg (57%). Last spring McNeese had their worst defense in over 10 years allowing 441 ypg and 29 ppg. Last fall 13 of the top 16 tacklers returned and this unit looked to be in better shape. While they allowed 371 ypg and 25 ppg, they did hold foes to 71 ypg less than their season average and collected 33 sacks. This season they return their top tackler, 3 starters on the DLine, but lose all 4 starters in the secondary. The exp'd DLine will have to help out the lesser exp'd secondary or else this defense may take a step back this season.

2022 - Back in 2019 McNeese went 9-2 but were left out of the FCS playoffs. McNeese has not been to the playoffs since 2015. Last fall McNeese opened just 1-4 including a loss to West Florida. They ended the season going 3-3 to finish with a 4-7 record, but in their last 4 losses, 3 of them were by 4 points or less. They bring back 8 starters on offense this season but just 4 starters on defense and they open the season on the road at Montana St, who was in the FCS title game last fall. After a game at Rice the Cowboys get 3 straight home games. Off a bye they travel to Texas A&M-Commerce and Nicholls but then have 3 straight home games and host SELA, E. Illinois, and Nicholls before closing at Northwestern St. The offense will need to find a new QB and the secondary will have to come together, but if they can this team should be competitive and could even finish the season with a winning record if things fall their way.