

MISSOURI ST BEARS

POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

QUARTERBACKS - In '20 the Bears brought in PS#35 Jaden Johnson (orig SMiss). Johnson started all 3 Fall games. He returned in spring and started the first 3 games but missed 2 with injury. Matt Struck threw for 174 and 245 in those. Johnson returned for the final 2 and finished with 1,028 (53%, 3-6) and rushed for 111 (1.2). Struck threw for 548 (62%, 2-2) and was the lone loss to the unit. They added transfer Jason Shelley (PS#45) who started 5 games for Utah in 2018 and 4 at Utah State in '20. He didn't have the strongest arm but is very accurate and won the job. Shelley started all 12 games and took nearly every snap. He threw for 374 vs YSU, 343 vs NDakota and 320 vs NIU. He finished with 3,347 (58.8%, 22-9) and was their #3 rusher with 442 (2.9) and 10 td's. Shelley was 1st Team All-MVFC and he returns. Van Dyne (4-9-51-0-2) and Johnson (1 att) depart. They add PS#47 Minnesota transfer Jacob Clark, Alabama A&M transfer Kaden McMullen and SMO St transfer Reid Potts. Their depth is inexperienced but as long as Shelley stays healthy they have one of the best QB's in the league.

RUNNING BACKS - Kevon Latulus is explosive and had 18-142-7.9 in fall of '20 but missed the spring. He returned last year and was their leading rusher with 625 (6.9) along with 174 rec (13.4). Louisville transfer Tobias Little had 260 (4.1) in their spring season. He found a bigger role in fall and rushed for 599 (4.4), tying for a team high 10 td's. Celdon Manning was the top rusher the last 3 games of spring and finished #2 with 269 (3.8) and was #4 receiver (143, 11.0) but he only appeared in 1 game last year due to injury. They lost their top rusher last year but we felt they would have the best RB output in over 3 years and they did with Latulas and Little combining for 1,224. Little departs this year and Latulas will also see considerable time in the slot. Manning is back from injury. They add PS#120 Kansas St transfer Jacardia Wright (195, 4.8 3Y). 225 lb JUCO transfer Andrew Cunningham (orig GA Southern) was supposed to play a big role last year but was injured in camp. He is back so this is a deeper unit.

RECEIVERS - Last year they lost their #3 WR (280, 11.7) and their leading receiver Damoriea Vick (422, 10.8 '20-'21) only played in 4 games then left. They added size with Central Michigan transfer Tyrone Scott (6'3" 202) who had 650 (17.6) as a rFr in '19. Scott had 60 yards in his first two games then topped 100 in 5 of his next 6. He led with 1,110 (16.8) with 8 td's. WKU transfer Xavier Lane was #2 with 784. Jordan Murray was #3 with 351 (13.5) and Isaac Smith added 218 (18.2). This year Lane, Murray and Smith all depart along with TE Tiavaasue (7 st, 173, 12.4). Scott returns and they add Cincy transfer Jordan (PS#95, 780, 14.2 4Y). They actually have 9 WR/TE's that have been on FBS rosters so they are building depth that should replace the guys they lost and with Scott returning they are in better shape than they were entering LY.

OFFENSIVE LINE - In '19 MOST rushed for just 74 ypg (2.4, 26 sk). Last year they returned 4 starters and added Coastal Carolina transfer Scott Fitzgerald. They went from a poor unit to a productive unit, averaging 153 rush ypg (4.2) but did allow 47 sacks (11.4%)! The Bears return 4 starters this year, only losing their two LG's. They had great health last year with the 4 returning starters playing all 12 games and if they stay healthy again then this is the one of the stronger Olines in the Valley.

DEFENSIVE LINE - The Bears biggest improvement in '20-'21 was in run defense where they allowed just 119 ypg and 3.3 ypc with 26 sacks (8.6%). Last year they returned two all preseason All-MVFC DL and added Allen Love (PS#133) from Mississippi St. The Bears allowed 127 ypg (3.8) with 30 sacks (7.5%). This year MSU loses 3rd Tm All-MVFC Eric Johnson (12 st, #7 tkl'r, 6.5 tfl). They return their #5, #10, #11, #13, #14, #16 and #20 tacklers. Kevin Ellis led with 8 sacks and was 2nd Team All-MVFC. They add Central Mich transfer NG Tico Brown (13 st, 45 tkl 3Y) so they basically have 4 starters back and should be even better this year.

LINEBACKERS - Tyler Wiltz was their #1 tackler in '20. He returned last year and had 106 tackles, led with 14.5 tfl's including 3.5 sacks and had 3 int's. Ferrin Manuleleua was their #3 tackler with 70 tackles (4.5 tfl). Wiltz was a 3rd Team All-American but he transferred to Pitt. They also lose #8 tkl'r Tyler Lovelace (6 st). Only 1 starter returns and they lost an All-American so this unit is down and they didn't bring in any transfer additions as of yet.

DEFENSIVE BACKS - In '19 MSU allowed 217 pass ypg (64.1%, 21-7) and finished last in the Valley in pass D efficiency. They moved up to #7 in '20-'21 when they gave up 234 pass ypg (58.8%, 17-8). Last year they returned 1st Team All-MVFC CB Montrae Braswell (#3 tkl'r, 3 int '20-'21) and S Kyriq McDonald who started out at Cincy before transferring here and was their #5 tkl'r in '20-'21 despite playing just 6 games. They moved up to #5 in Pass D efficiency, allowing 244 ypg (54.5%, 21-15). This year they lose #2 tkl'r Titus Wall (12 st, 5 pd) and CB Zack Sanders (6 st, #12 tkl'r, 4 pbu). 3rd Team AA Braswell returns (#6 tkl'r, 4 int, 13 pbu) as well as 2nd Team All-MVFC S McDonald (#4 tkl'r, 9.5 tfl, 10 pd). They also add transfers Chukwuma "Wes" Anusiem (Central Ark, 37 tkl 2Y), CJ Crump (E Carolina, PS#391), CB Caleb Blake (Florida St), Dillon Thomas (No Illinois, PS#322, 62 tkl LY) and Aaron Harris (No Colorado, 87 tkl, 2 int 2Y). Five of their top 7 DB's are back we think they move up the Pass D rankings for a 3rd straight year.

SPECIAL TEAMS - In '20-'21 new P Grant Burkett averaged 43.1 with a net of just 35.8. Jose Pizano hit a super 12-14 FG with a long of 47. Kyriq McDonald had 7.2 on 10 PR's and Montrae Braswell was explosive with 29.1 on KR's. Every-one returned last year. Burkett boomed his punts to the tune of a 46.2 avg (42.9 net!). Jose Pizano made 21-24 fg's (L/51). Braswell had a fantastic 29.5 average with 1 td. The only subpar unit was their PR (3.2 avg). Pizano, Braswell and Burkett all return this year. Both Pizano and Burkett were 3rd Team All-Americans. You will be hard pressed to find a better ST's unit in the FCS.

COACHES - Bobby Petrino took the head coaching job here in '20. This is his 3rd year here and he has already made a huge impact, taking them to back-to-back playoff appearances which is wild considering they hadn't made the playoffs since 1990! Petrino was HC at Louisville ('14-'18), WKU ('13), Arkansas ('08-'11) and Louisville ('03-'06) along with a short NFL stint with the Falcons in '07. His OC is his son Nick Petrino. He was OC at UT Martin in '19 and coached under Bobby at Louisville from '15-'18 and helped develop Lamar Jackson. Ryan Beard is the 3rd year DC. He was ST/S Coach at Central Mich in '19 and DB Coach at Louisville in '17-'18. Nelson Fishback is the 3rd year ST Coordinator.

FORECAST

OFFENSE - Bobby Petrino made a huge impact immediately on this offense. In '19 they averaged just 15 ppg and 284 ypg and were held 83 ypg under what their foes allowed on average (#112 in FCS). They were dead last in both scoring and total offense in the Valley. In '20-'21 they improved to 18 ppg but still only 280 ypg. They finished 8th out of 9 in total offense. Last year they added QB Shelley from Utah/Utah St, RB Little from Louisville, WR Scott from Central Michigan and RG Scott Fitzgerald from Coastal Carolina. They improved by more than 2 td's, averaging 34 ppg and 436 ypg. They were 2nd in both scoring and total offense in the Valley! This year 7 starters return including QB Shelley. Three players including Shelley are 1st Team Preseason All-MVFC. They have more depth at RB and added more transfers at WR so they should be just as good.

DEFENSE - In '19 Missouri St allowed 36 ppg and 442 ypg. In Petrino's first year they made a solid jump, allowing 27 ppg and 353 ypg. They returned with 23 of their top 24 tacklers back from spring last year. They held Oklahoma St to 23 points and 369 yards in the opener. Overall they allowed 26 ppg and 371 ypg. This year they lose their top 2 tacklers but 14 of their top 20 are back. They are tied for the most players on the 1st Team All-MVFC Team including CB Braswell and S McDonald. They should make another improvement with one of the top secondaries in the Valley.

2022 - Missouri St finished below .500 every year of the last decade. In '19 they went 1-10 and were -158 ypg. Dave Steckel was let go after 5 seasons with just a 13-42 record. They made a splash hire in Bobby Petrino who fizzled out at Louisville, but no one could deny his coaching acumen with successful stops at Louisville and Arkansas, plus he was the head coach when Lamar Jackson won the Heisman. They started 0-3 in Petrino's first season then won 5 of their next 6 and shared a piece of the Missouri Valley Title, and a spot in the FCS Playoffs, both their first conference championship and playoff trip since 1990! Last year they loaded the roster with transfer additions. MSU nearly upset OKSt in the opener, losing 23-16. They beat #16 Central Ark 43-34 and started 3-1. They were upset at YSU but bounced back with a 30 point win over Indiana St then led North Dakota St 20-13 4Q but lost by 7. The Bears won their next 4 games but lost in the first round of the FCS Playoffs to UT Martin. They went 8-4 and were +65 ypg. All 4 losses were by 8 points or less. This year Petrino has 14 starters back and added even more transfers. They have road games at Central Ark and makes a return trip to Arkansas. They miss North Dakota St and host South Dakota St so they do have a nice schedule edge in conference play. The Bears were picked 3rd in the preseason and could make their 3rd straight trip to the FCS Playoffs.