

MURRAY ST

POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

QUARTERBACKS - In the spring of '21 Preston Rice returned at QB (12 st, 2932, 64%, 20-13 in '19) and he threw for 1,294 yds (9-5 ratio) and was named 2nd Tm OVC but his accuracy went down as he only hit 52.5% of his throws. Rice had dual-threat ability (366 rush in '19) and ran for 225 yds (3.8, 6 td) last spring. Rice returned last fall and started the F/5 games but dealt with a shoulder inj and only saw action in 2 more games all season. DJ Williams was the starter for the L/6 games and his best performance came at SE Missouri (240 pass, 81 rush) he also ran for 121 yds against SE Missouri later in the season. Overall Williams led with 1,020 pass yds (55.7%, 3-4) and also was the #2 rusher (532, 6.5, 6 td). Rice threw for 736 (51.2%, 1-10) and ended up entering the portal and is now at Middle Tennessee. Williams is back this season, and while we have confidence he will have success as the starter, the backups behind him are quite inexp'd, so if Williams, a dual-threat QB, gets hurt this unit could be in big trouble.

RUNNING BACKS - Damonta Weatherspoon (499, 4.7, 5 td, 2nd Tm OVC) along with Rodney Castille (143, 2.5) were the top 2 RB's in the spring of 2021. Both returned last fall and Weatherspoon finished as the top rusher (910, 4.3, 8 td) and was 3rd Tm OVC, while Castille was the #4 rusher (QB #2) with 151 rush (3.3). This season they lose Castille, but Weatherspoon returns along with Cortez Jones (264, 5.9) and Q'Darryius Jennings should have a larger role (4 rush yds LY). With their leading rusher back, this unit enters 2022 in pretty good shape.

RECEIVERS - The receivers in the spring '21 season were led by 1st Tm OVC WR LaMarte Brooks who had 37 rec for 429 yds (11.6) and Jacob Bell was #2 with 21 rec for 305 yds (14.5, 2nd Tm OVC) while DeQuan Dallas finished #3 with 13 rec for 289 yds (22.2). All three of those players were back last fall and Brooks was again the top guy with 447 yds (13.5) and was 2nd Tm OVC. Bell was the #3 receiver (234, 11.7) and Dallas only played in 3 games and was the #7 receiver (88, 44.0). Malik Honeycutt was the #2 receiver (331, 17.4) and TE Jake Saathoff was the #5 receiver (125, 7.8). Of the top 7 receivers from last season the only loss for Murray St is Honeycutt so they bring back plenty of talent & along with a returning QB this unit looks to be in great shape & should produce better numbers.

OFFENSIVE LINE - The OLine only paved the way for 120 ypg (3.8) in '19 and they allowed 26 sacks (5.6%). The OLine was solid and steady for the Racers in the spring '21 as they had the same starting five in 6 of their 7 games and they paved the way for 142 rush ypg (3.9). They also allowed just 5 sacks on the season and 3 of them were in the final game. Last fall all 5 starters were back and the OLine paved the way for 185 rush ypg (4.5) including 246 ypg (5.7) the L/3 games and allowed 16 sacks (5.7%) for the season. Murray St returns just 2 starting OL including 1st Tm OVC C Levi Nesler and LT Jacob Frye. With just a pair of starters back, this unit may be a work in progress early on as they work in three new starters.

DEFENSIVE LINE - In the spring '21 season Murray St allowed 133 rush ypg (3.7) in the F/4 games and collected 10 sacks. In the final 3 games they allowed 222 ypg (5.2) and had just 3 sacks in the L/3 games. Overall they allowed 171 rush ypg (4.4). Last fall all 3 starters were back and in games 1-4 and 8-11 they allowed 115 rush ypg (3.6) but in games 5-7 they allowed 288 ypg (6.2). Overall they gave up 162 ypg (4.5) and they collected 18 sacks (5.8%). This season they lose DE Ethan Edmondson (8 st, 14 tkl, 2 tfl) along with Kameron Petty (8 st, 12 tkl) and Eric Johanning (L/6 st, 13 tkl, 2.5 tfl). They also lose Izaiah Reed (F/5 st, 12 tkl, 1 st). Of the 7 players that started on the DLine last fall the only returnee is CJ Barnes (2 st, 20 tkl, 4 tfl) and this unit may struggle against the run and rushing the QB with so much exp'd talent leaving.

LINEBACKERS - Last fall Murray St returned their top 3 LB tacklers from the spring season where they allowed 352 ypg and 23 ppg. Eric Samuta was the #1 tackler again last fall (11 st, 72 tkl, 4 tfl) and was 2nd Tm OVC. Alec Long (#2 tkl'r in spring) was the #10 tackler (23 tkl) and Tay Carothers (#3 tkl'r in spring) only played in 3 games & had 8 tackles. Lawaun Powell (L/5 st, 53 tkl, 5 tfl) was the #2 tackler, while Levi Metheny was the #6 tackler and Jacobi Hearn/Darnel Victor were t-#7 tackler. This season Samuta and Powell return along with Victor (26 tkl, 2.5 tfl). With 3 of the top 5 tacklers back this unit is in much better shape than the DLine entering 2022.

DEFENSIVE BACKS - The Racers pass defense held foes last spring to 181 pass ypg & held opposing QB's to just 52.6% completions for the season. The MSU defense also had 11 INT's last spring. All starters returned for the Racers secondary last fall and the pass defense allowed just 185 pass ypg (56.1%) but recorded just 6 int's for the season. Safeties Cortez Roberts (11 st, #3 tkl'r, 2.5 tfl) and Jamari Dailey (L/7 st, #4 tkl'r, 2 pbu) led the secondary while CB's Marcis Floyd (11 st, #5 tkl'r, 3 sk, 9 pbu, 2 int) and Quinaz Turner (10 st, 3 tfl, 8 pbu, 2 int) both had stellar seasons. This season Floyd (1st Tm OVC) and Roberts both depart but they return Turner (4th Tm OVC) and Dailey along with backup CB's Cayvian Holmes (20 tkl) and DaVontae McKee (19 tkl, 2 sk, 3 pbu, 2 int). The Racers do have decent depth at CB but will need a new starter to emerge at S if they are to come close to last season's production as a pass defense.

SPECIAL TEAMS - In 2019 Murray St had 2 kickers combine for just 7-19 fg's (2 blocked). The punter in 2019 averaged 39.7 yds per punt (L/53) with a net of 36.6 yds. The leading KR in 2019 totaled 210 yds (1 td, 30.0) and the top PR had 74 yds (1 td, 24.7). Aaron baum was the main fg kicker in the spring of '21 and he connected on 7-10 fg's (L/58) and one of his misses was blocked. Louis Halton was the main punter last spring & averaged 39.3 yds while Baum punted 7 times (33.0 avg). Last spring Murray St's team net was 35.5 yds. Last spring WR Honeycutt was the top PR (123, 11.2) and #2 KR (101, 20.2) and the #1 KR had 169 yds (18.8). Last fall Baum was back as the fg kicker and hit 12-18 fg's and again had a long of 58 yds! Halton was back as the punter and averaged 37 yds per punt (L/52) with a net of 35.8 yds. Honeycutt was again the top PR (125, 11.4, 1 td) and WR Dameron Gomes was the top KR (306, 19.1). This season both Baum and Halton are back as the K and P plus KR Gomes returns, and this unit looks to be in very good shape entering the season.

COACHES - Dean Hood took over as the new HC at Murray St in 2020 and in the spring '21 season went 5-2 and last fall went 6-5. Prior to Hood taking over here he was the ST coordinator at Kentucky ('17-'19)

and was the TE coach at Charlotte at '16. Hood also was the HC at Eastern Kentucky from 2008-15 (55-38) and made the playoffs 3 times. Ben Hodges enters his 3rd season as the OC here. Before MSU Hodges was the LB coach at the Citadel in 2019 and was the ST coordinator at Saginaw Valley St in 2018. Dillon Sanders is also in his 3rd season as the DC. Sanders was the LB coach at New Mexico in 2019 and prior to that spent 3 seasons at Kentucky as a grad assistant. Chris Cunningham is the Special Teams Coordinator.

FORECAST

OFFENSE - In 2017 the Racers put up just 294 ypg including twice not breaking 100 total yards in a game! In '18 MSU returned 8 starters and they gained 140 more ypg (404) and scored a TD more per game (28 ppg)! The Racers had to replace their QB in '19 but still managed to put up 379 ypg, but scored just 23 ppg. In the spring of '21 the offense put up just 327 ypg, but 28 ppg. All 11 starters were back last fall, but the offensive numbers only went up to 346 ypg and the ppg dropped to 22 ppg. The Racers also were held to 23 ypg under what their foes allowed on average. This season the offense returns 7 starters including QB Williams. Their biggest ? is on the OLine with 3 starters lost, but this unit looks to be in decent shape entering 2022.

DEFENSE - In 2017 MSU's defense held teams to under 400 ypg (390) and 30 ppg (29) for the first time since '11. With 5 starters back in '18, MSU's defense took a step back to allowing 456 ypg and 35 ppg. Through the F/5 gms of '19 MSU allowed 500+ yds in 3 gms (2 gms vs FBS foes) but in OVC play they allowed 373 ypg and 26 ppg. Last spring MSU held their F/2 foes to 213 yds and 185 yds respectively but then allowed 413 ypg and 27 ppg over their final 5 games. Last fall Murray St's defense the Racers returned all 11 starters and the defense allowed 347 ypg and 25 ppg. This season the Racers DLine lose 6 of their top 7 tacklers, but return 3 of the top 5 LB's and 4 of the top 6 DB's. With 5 starters back on defense they will need their LB's and secondary to step up while the new DLine starters gets acclimated.

2022 - Though the 2020 season was delayed until the spring, Hood led Murray St to their first winning season since 2011 & their best OVC record since 2005. The Racers opened up 5-0 which tied the best start in team history, but dropped their final 2 games including a 28-14 loss to OVC champion Jacksonville St. Last fall Murray St opened 3-5 before winning their L/3 games to finish with a winning record again under HC Hood. This season Murray St opens at Texas Tech and then faces a tough Jacksonville St team before travelling to Ball St. They also play at SE Louisiana in non-conf play. The Racers do open OVC play with 3 of their first 4 games at home and then face Robert Morris at home late in the year before closing at SE Missouri. The Racers have the talent to be competitive, but will need to have their inexp'd OLine and DLine step up if they are to have a winning season & truly be contenders in the OVC.