

# NORFOLK ST SPARTANS

## POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

**QUARTERBACKS** - In '18 Juwan Carter was back after starting his freshman season. He threw for 2,302 (58%, 13-14) and rushed for 160 (2.5) in '18. They brought in former USC QB Coach in '19 and Carter improved to a 23-8 ratio. He led the MEAC in pass yards, total offense and tied for TD passes which was also the most at NSU since they joined the FCS. He threw for 377 vs Howard and had 2,631 (61%) with 225 rush (2.4). NSU didn't play during the Covid season. Carter returned in '21. He threw for 368 vs Morgan St and led with 2,511 passing (63.8%) and had a 21-5 ratio along with 390 rush (4.3) and 6 td's. He was named the MEAC Offensive Player of the Year but he is gone this year. No other QB on the current roster attempted a pass last year. They added transfer Jaylan Adams (1,071, 50%, 7-5, 948 rush, 4.3) but he has been running the option the last 2 years for The Citadel. Eastern Illinois transfer Otto Kuhns threw for 1,134 but only 46.5% and a 6-10 ratio last year. The transfer additions give them some experience but in some ways add even more questions to a unit that can't match what Carter did the last 2 seasons.

**RUNNING BACKS** - Last year lost 3 of their top 4 rushers from '19 but did return Kevin Johnson who led with 468 (5.4). JJ Davis was a Walk On at Cincinnati in '19 then transferred here. He had a huge season, finishing with 887 and a fantastic 7.2 ypc with 10 td's along with 194 receiving. Davis had a 3 game stretch where he topped 100 in each including 217 on 18 carries vs NC Central. Davis returns as one of the top RB's, not just in the MEAC but in the FCS. He was named 3rd Team BOXTOROW Preseason All-American. They lose Cameryn Brent (388, 3.8), Kevin Johnson (228, 4.7, 96 rec) and Rayquan Smith (116, 4.5) while they also return Lex Henry (281, 5.3). Only two of their top 5 are back but as long as Davis stays healthy then this is their strength.

**RECEIVERS** - Justin Smith was #4 in '18 with 261 and had a team high 21.8 ypc. He led in '19 with 639 (17.8) and Da'Kendall James was #2 with 557 (15.1). Tylan McElhenie was #3 with 362 (15.7) and Marcque Ellington had 30 (12.1). Last year 3 of their top 4 were back from '19, only losing McElhenie. Smith improved to 758 (14.9) and was 1st Team All-MEAC. Da'Quan Felton stepped up as #2 with 492 (17.6). Ellington was #3 with 263 (12.0) and Tremayne Talbert added 207 (10.4). This year they lose Smith and Ellington along with TE Anthony Williams (7 st, 88, 11.0). Three of their top 5 are back including James who only had 195 (9.3) last year. They have a less experienced QB throwing their way and lost their top guy. If James returns to form they have a decent top 3 but their production will almost certainly take a dip.

**OFFENSIVE LINE** - NSU only rushed for 145 (3.8) and allowed 26 sacks (7.3%) in '19. Last year they improved to 212 ypg (5.0) and allowed just 18 sacks! This year NSU loses 3 starters including 1st Team All MEAC LT Jalen Powell, 1st Team All-MEAC RG Justin Redd and 1st Team All-MEAC RT D'Montre Smith. With 3 All conference OL gone this unit is clearly down. They do get their LT and C back and they do add Jeremiah Bolling-Farrar from Wagner and Eagan Atkins from Grambling so they are more experienced than the losses indicate.

**DEFENSIVE LINE** - Run D was the Spartans biggest issue in '19 when they allowed 217 (5.4) rush ypg. They had a 6 game stretch where they allowed

271 ypg (6.9) but did improve down the stretch, only allowing 114 (3.2) in their last 4. They also finished with 26 sacks. Last year the DL returned two of it's top four leading tacklers including Chris Myers, who started all 12 games at DE in his first year at NSU and was All-MEAC 1st Team, tying the MEAC lead with 9.0 sacks. De'Shaan Dixon was 3rd Team All-MEAC. They went from their weakness to their strength, allowing just 129 (3.8) and 27 sacks (8.5%) with DE De'Shaan Dixon leading with 9. Dixon departs this year (11 st, #3 tkl'r), DE Myers (11 st, #5 tkl'r, 5.5 sk, 2 tfl) and NT Remy Feltes (11 st, #10 tkl'r, 3 tfl). Only 1 starter returns in DT Anthony Blume (#9 tkl'r) and their backups didn't get much run last year (#16, #19, #20 tkl'rs) so this group is very inexperienced.

**LINEBACKERS** - Last year NSU lost their #1, #6 and #7 tacklers from '19. With all 3 starters gone this was their least experienced unit. Tyler Long led with 78 tackles (3.5 tfl) and Marquis Hall was #4 with 49. Liberty transfer NB Tayvion Land had 5 pd and was their #11 tkl'r. All 3 return this year and their only loss is Matt Hodges (12 tkl). They go from losing all 3 starters to getting all 3 back. Depth is the only concern here but they are much better coming in this year.

**DEFENSIVE BACKS** - Norfolk St allowed 206 pass ypg (60.6%, 18-18) and were 4th in pass D efficiency. Last year they returned 3 of their top 5 DB's including RJ Coles. CB's Brandon Savage and Justin Toler tied with 3 int's. RJ Coles was their #2 tkl'r. They allowed 238 pass ypg (55.8%, 23-14) and were 4th in Pass D Efficiency again. This year they only lose CB Devyn Coles (5 st, #12 tkl'r, 8 pd). They return their #2, #6, #7, #8, #13, #14, #15 and #18 tacklers. They also add PS#152 Virginia transfer Joseph White. With 8 of their top 9 back this is their most experienced unit and the strength of the defense.

**SPECIAL TEAMS** - Josh Nardone set a school-record with 40 PATs in '19 while converting 81.8% of his FGA. Ryan Richter recorded the fifth highest punting average in school history (39.7) in '19. Both returned last year. Nardone only made 7 of 15 fg's (L/41). Richter tried 2 fg's and missed both and his average dropped to 35.0 and NSU had 7 punts blocked! Their team net was just 22.7, the lowest we've ever seen. They allowed 18.3 average and 2 PR td's. Tremayne Talbert had 49 PR yards (9.8) while Kevin Johnson had 230 KR (19.2) and JJ Davis had 207 (17.2). Both Richter and Nardone depart. This was a historically bad ST's unit last year and they can only get better but have no experience.

**COACHES** - Dawson Odums took over last year at Norfolk St after being the head man at Southern for 9 years and had a 63-32 record including 4 division Titles and one SWAC Title in '13. He was the DC at North Carolina A&T from '08-'10. OC Ryan Meyers was the QB Coach last year and has been promoted to OC this year. He was the QB Coach at Millsaps for 2 years and also coached under Hal Mumme for 2 years at Belhaven (DIII). 2nd year DC Steve Adams also coaches the LB's. He was the DC for 2 years at Glenville St and coached under Odums for 4 years at Southern as ST Coord. Vincent Marshall is the 2nd year ST's Coordinator.

## FORECAST

**OFFENSE** - From '12-'18 Norfolk St averaged less than 20 ppg. They did go from 266 ypg to 323 ypg in '17 to '18. QB Juwan Carter turned the offense around in '19 when they put up 29 ppg and 375 ypg. They were even better vs MEAC foes, averaging 32 ppg and 416 ypg. After taking the year off in '20 the Spartans returned much younger but did have QB Carter and their top WR, Justin Smith back. RB JJ Davis emerged as a big play threat and the Spartans averaged 33.2 and 441 ypg. They put up 35 ypg more than their foes allowed on average (#29 in FCS). This year they lose Carter who set the school's career record for passing yards. Only 4 starters return but Davis is the MEAC Preseason Offensive POY and they added a couple of experienced guys on the OL so the run game might be strong but the passing game is a huge question mark.

**DEFENSE** - NSU allowed just 345 ypg and 27 ppg in '18. They slipped to 29 ppg and 423 ypg. Against MEAC foes they only gave up 25 ppg and 386 ypg. Only 5 starters returned last year and they improved to 367 ypg allowed but gave up 30.7 ppg. This year the Spartans have 8 starters back. They return 15 of their top 20 tacklers including 7 of their top 9. Four players earned Preseason All-Conference honors and they are much more experienced than last year.

**2022** - Norfolk St suffered 8 straight losing seasons from '12-'19. They won exactly 4 games each season for 5 straight seasons then finished 5-6 in '19. The mediocrity was enough for them to fire HC Latrell Scott and they brought in Dawson Odums who was extremely successful in turning the Southern program around where he had a career record of 63-32. The Spartans sat out the Covid season and came back with a brutal 2 game stretch to open, at Toledo and at Wake Forest. They were blown out in both but built confidence in a win over over a DII school. They won at St. Francis then beat Hampton 47-44 in OT. After beating NAIA Virginia-Lynchburg then beat Howard and Morgan St to reach 6 wins. They were 6-2 and led NC Central 21-0 2Q but lost in OT 38-36. The next week they led Delaware St 26-0 at half but it was deja vu as they lost 28-26. NSU led SC State 14-10 3Q but lost by 10 to finish 6-5. They were +73 ypg and +85 ypg vs MEAC foes. The Spartans have 12 starters back this year. They are likely to start 0-2 again, traveling to Marshall and James Madison but the rest of the schedule is reasonable. They get 3 home games vs MEAC foes and could very well be 3-0 in the conference going into their final 2 games vs NC Central and at South Carolina St. This was a team that very easily could have won 8 straight games last year if it weren't for two blown leads of 21 and 26 points and they led every FCS they played in the 2nd half at one point. They are picked 3rd in the MEAC. If they can get quality play from their new QB then they are a real threat to win the MEAC Title.