

SE LOUISIANA

POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

QUARTERBACKS - Arkansas transfer Cole Kelley (PS#55) who is 6'7" 260 lbs was the backup in 2019 and threw for 816 yds (74%, 10-2). Kelley became the starter in the spring of 2021 and he threw for 2662 (68.9%) with a 18-4 ratio and won the Walter Payton award! Last season Kelley came back and had an all-time great year. He topped 300 yards in 11 of his 13 starts and even topped 400 yards in 4 games, with his top performance coming against Incarnate Word where he threw for 647 yards (73%, 3-0)! Overall Kelley threw for 5,124 yards (73.6%, 44-10) which was #2 all-time in the FCS for pass yards in a season. Kelley also set the FCS record for completion % in a season and was the Southland POY, 1st Tm AA and runner up for the Walter Payton award. Kelley was also the leading rusher on the team (491, 3.0, 16 td). Kelley finishes as SLU's single-season and career leader in passing yards, passing touchdowns, total offense and rushing touchdowns. Kelley departs this season & was an UFA with Washington. SLU returns South Alabama transfer Cephus Johnson (149, 41.7%, 1-0, 246 rush, 7.0 ypc LY) and they add Colby Suits from ULM, who started 8 games in 2020 & threw for 1537 yds (61%, 8-7), but was just a backup at ULM last season. No matter who takes over at QB, this unit is set to take a massive step back with the loss of the best QB to ever put on a SLU uniform.

RUNNING BACKS - The top rusher in the spring of '21 was Morgan Ellison (263, 5.8) but he was gone going into last fall. Taron Jones was #2 rusher in '19 (358, 4.6) and he returned and the unit was bolstered by UCLA transfer Jahmon McClendon (PS#171). QB Kelley was the #1 rusher last season & had the most attempts (161), but the top RB was T.Jones (370, 4.4, 6 td) and he also recorded 401 rec yards (9.1). The #2 RB was McClendon (188, 4.8). Jones and McClendon are back this season, along with Jessie Britt (134, 3.9). QB C. Johnson was the #3 rusher and he is back too. With the loss of their prolific QB, SLU may look to rush the ball more and with their top 3 RB's back, and we think they will perform well this season as long as they can remain healthy.

RECEIVERS - The top 4 WR's all returned last fall with CJ Turner leading in the spring with 534 (12.1, 5 td), Ed Magee was #2 (493, 12.6), Austin Mitchell was #3 with 354 (14.8) and Tim Wilson was #5 (251, 15.7). Last fall Mitchell took over as the top WR and led with 1184 (15.2, 10 td) and was 1st Tm Southland. TE Nolan Givan (former Ball St, San Diego St TE) was #2 with 572 (10.2, 6 td) and was also 1st Tm Southland. Gage Larvadain (3rd Tm Southland) finished as the #3 receiver (521, 14.1, 5 td) while Turner was the #4 receiver (464, 17.2, 5 td). Overall 10 receivers recorded at least 140 rec yards and 6 of them are gone this season. The top returnees are Larvadain (7 st), Turner (6 st before OFY) and Terrell Carter (3 st, 343, 14.9). But with the loss of a 1st Tm Southland WR and TE and their depth taking a hit, this unit won't replicate LY's impressive numbers.

OFFENSIVE LINE - SLU ran for 117 rush ypg (3.4) and gave up 24 sacks (7.7%) in the 7-game spring '21 season. All 5 starters returned on the Offensive line last fall, led by 1st team preseason OL Jalen Bell and 2nd team preseason OL Ethan McMullan, Rendon Miles-Character and Drew Jones. There was some improvement to the rushing attack, as SLU paved the way for 145 rush ypg (4.2) but they allowed 29 sacks in 13 games (5.1%) with 8 sacks coming the L/2 games. Just two starters return on the OLine this season in LG John Allen and LT Jalen Bell, who were both 2nd Tm Southland last season. They lose a trio of starters including C Drew Jones and RG Ethan McMullan who were both 3rd Tm Southland. This

unit may struggle to match last season's numbers with the loss of three starters.

DEFENSIVE LINE - SLU's run defense allowed 245 rush ypg (5.8) and collected 11 sacks in 7 games in the spring season of 2021. Last fall the Lions rush defense improved to allowing 149 rush ypg (4.7) and they collected 22 sacks (5.0%). This DLine was led by 3rd Tm Southland Bryce Cage (L/7 st, 23 tkl, 4 tfl) along with 2nd Tm Southland Garrett Crawford (L/6 st, 22 tkl, 6 sk) and John Graves (11 st, 20 tkl, 4 sk) and they all return this season. The lone starter lost up front is Brendon Kelley (11 st, 16 tkl, 2.5 tfl). With 6 of the top 7 DL back for this season, the Lions again should have a solid run defense and should be able to better get after the QB.

LINEBACKERS - The Lions defense allowed 521 ypg and 36 ppg in the spring of 2021. Coming into last fall they had an experienced defense returning, and they would show some improvement as they allowed 429 ypg and 33 ppg. The leading tackler was Alexis Ramos (10 st, 78 tkl, 8 tfl, 5 pbu) and was 2nd Tm Southland. NB Jack Henderson was the #2 tackler (13 st, 51 tkl, 2 int) & was 4th Tm Southland, while Herman Christophe was t-#3 tackler (10 st, 42 tkl, 2.5 tfl) and was 3rd Tm Southland. They lose Ramos along with Mike Mason (4 st, 42 tkl) at LB, but return Henderson and Christophe. Five of the top 8 return overall & this unit is in solid shape entering 2022.

DEFENSIVE BACKS - The pass defense for SLU gave up 375+ yds in 3 of the 7 games in the spring of '21 & allowed opposing QB's to hit 59.7% and collected 9 int's. Last fall the SLU secondary was experienced, but struggled at times including allowing 616 pass yds to Incarnate Word. They also gave up 65.1% completions and picked off 16 passes. The unit was led by CB Zy Alexander (13 st, 39 tkl, 7 pbu, 6 int) who was 3rd Tm All-American and S Donniel Ward-Magee (9 st, 40 tkl, 2 pbu) was 3rd Tm Southland. CB Brandon Barbee (3 st, 28 tkl, 3 pbu) and DB Justin Dumas (18 tkl, 2 int) also have solid years and they both return along with Alexander and Ward-Magee. SLU does lose S's Alphonso Taylor (8 st, 39 tkl, 2 int), Matt Wright (4 st, 28 tkl) and Sterling Fisher (L/4 st, 26 tkl). However, with 5 players who started last season including 3 starters, this unit should hopefully see some improvements in their pass D this season.

SPECIAL TEAMS - All four special teams players were back last fall led by K Mateo Rengifo who hit 9-10 fg's with a long of 36 yards and P Austin Dunlap who avg 43.7 with a 40.6 net! Top PR Austin Mitchell had just one PR all year (3.0, defense was poor) and top KR was Javon Conner (19.9). Rengifo connected on 10-15 fg's last season and was 3rd Tm Southland, but his long was just 39 yards. Dunlap averaged 43.3 yards per punt with a net of 38.7 yards and was 4th Tm Southland. WR Larvadain led the Lions with 611 KR yards (26.6, 1 td) and was 1st Tm Southland. SLU totaled just 62 PR yards all season. The good news is that this unit returns all their top specialists and should again be one of the conference's best ST units in 2022.

COACHES - Frank Scelfo enters year five at Southeastern, and has led the Lions to a 25-19 record over the past 4 years including 2 trips to the playoffs in the last 3 seasons. Prior to taking over here, Scelfo was the OC/QB coach at UTSA from 2016-17 and before that was an offensive assistant for the Jacksonville Jaguars in 2015 and was the QB coach there in 2013-14. Greg Stevens is the 5th year OC, who was previously the OC here in 2012-13. Stevens spent 2014-2017 as the OC at Eastern Illinois. The new DC is Bill D'Ottavio, who is in his 2nd year as a coach here & spent last season coaching the safeties. Steven Comuntzis is the ST Analyst.

FORECAST

OFFENSE - SLU's offense put up 428 ypg and 35 ppg in 2017. Under new HC Scelfo in 2018 the offense dipped a bit to gaining 407 ypg and scoring 26 ppg. The Lions averaged 485 ypg and 37 ppg in 2019, and those numbers jumped in the spring of 2021 as Southeastern's offense put up 509 ypg and 40 ppg on offense. Last season SLU's offense, led by QB Kelley, was lethal as they put up 552 ypg and 45 ppg. They put up 175 ypg more than their foes allowed, which was #2 in the FCS! This season they return just 5 starters and lose QB Kelley, their top 2 receivers, and 3 starting OL. There is no way this group matches what we saw out of the SLU offense last season, but they should still have a productive year.

DEFENSE - 2017 was the last year SLU allowed under 400 ypg for a season (375 ypg) and they allowed 26 ppg. Those defensive numbers jumped to 459 ypg and 34 ppg in 2018, but got a little better in 2019 as they allowed 414 ypg and 29 ppg. The defense cratered in the spring of 2021 as they gave up 521 ypg and 36 ppg! The defense saw solid improvement last fall as they allowed 429 ypg, but still gave up 33 ppg. This season 8 starters are back & overall 10 of the top 16 tacklers return, so if they stay healthy this unit may come close to cracking the 400 ypg barrier.

2022 - Southeastern has 4 playoff appearances since 2013 including making it in 2019 and again last fall. In 2019 SLU was +71 ypg and +7 ypg, and held conference foes to 372 ypg/23 ppg while allowing non-conf foes to put up 510 ypg/43 ppg, but overall the defense collected 43 sacks. In 2020 the offense averaged 40 ppg and over 500 ypg, but the defense did them in as they were -13 ypg and +3 ppg, losing all 3 games by 11 pts or less. Last season SLU's offense was elite as they were +123 ypg and 7 of their 9 wins were by double digits, while their first 3 losses were all by 3 points before losing by 39 pts to James Madison (just -39 yds, but -4 TO's). SLU's 2022 schedule opens up with games at FBS Louisiana and FAU. Three of their next 4 games are at home but do face Jacksonville St and McNeese on the road. After home games vs Houston Baptist & NWSt they close at Nicholls. SLU has major ? at QB and how that position plays out will dictate how the season goes, but we see the Lions taking a step back, and if this team finishes with a winning record that will be a good season for this SLU team.