

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS SALUKIS

POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

QUARTERBACKS- In spring Nic Baker took over for their injured starter vs North Dakota St and was the MVFC POW, throwing for 254 yards. He started the next 2 but was injured 1H vs #5 Northern Iowa. 3rd string QB Labanowitz who was a year removed from back surgery, led the 2nd upset of a top 5 team guiding the 17-16 comeback win. He started the final 5 games. Labanowitz led with 1,241 (72%, 8-4) with Baker #2 with 637 (68%, 3-4). Last year they added Cincinnati transfer Michael Lindauer and FIU transfer Stone Norton. This time Baker started all 13 games. He threw for 460 in the opener vs SEMO St, 359 vs South Dakota St and 306 vs Northern Iowa. Baker finished with 3,231 (63.1%, 27-11). Norton had 8 attempts for just 9 yards. Baker returns along with Norton, Zach Zebrowski (1 att) and Lindauer.

RUNNING BACKS Southern Illinois had two 1,000 yard rushers in '19 including Javon Williams who led with 1038 (6.4, 16 td). Romer Elliot was #3 with 496 (6.1). In spring they lost their #2 rusher but had the next 3 back and Williams was a weapon with 532 (4.4) but also threw 14 passes for 237 yards. Elliot was #2 (506, 4.1), Justin Strong was #3 with 408 (5.1). Their top 3 returned last year. Williams had 123 on just 3 carries vs Dayton but only finished with 564 (5.6). He also threw for 67 yards and had 115 receiving. Strong started all 12. He had 107 vs YSU and was #2 with 484 (5.8, 160 rec). Donnavan Spencer was #3 with 457 (5.3, 103 rec). Elliott added 267 (4.9). This year they only lose Spencer. With 3 of their top 4 back, they are in good shape. Williams is a 245 lb hammer that gets the tough yards and was named 1st Team Preseason All-MVFC. Strong has decent size at 215 lbs and Elliott is a diminutive bowling ball at 5'6" 190. Jacob Garrett is the best blocking Fullback in the Valley.

RECEIVERS- In '19 Wyoming transfer WR Avante Cox led with 617 (13.1) and Landon Lenoir was a close 2nd at 616 (15.0). In spring of '21 Cox was back and led with 834 (12.8) while Lenoir was #2 again with 590 (13.1). Strong who was #3 in '18 but missed '19 was #3 with 274 (9.1) and Jerron Rollins was #4 with 176 (9.8). Last year they only lost Strong so this was one of the stronger WR corps in the MVFC. Lenoir led with 876 (14.4) and had a team high 10 td's. Cox was #2 with 739 (17.2). RFr Isaiah Hartup was #3 with 502 (11.7) and Memphis transfer TE Tyce Daniel had 412 (12.9). Lenoir departs this year along with Jerron Rollins (292, 13.3). They add USF transfer Bryce Miller (669, 10.1 3Y). Cox was 1st Team Preseason All-MVFC and this group should be just as good despite losing their top guy.

OFFENSIVE LINE- In '19 the Oline paved the way for 255 (5.1) but allowed 11.1% sacks. In spring they had to replace a 2nd Tm MVFC OL. They returned 3 starters including 2nd Tm MVFC Zeveyon Furcron. While the rush yards dropped to 186 (4.5) they only

allowed 5% sacks. Last year 4 starters were back from an Oline that got in 10 games in the spring. They had 3 great performances including 406 vs Dayton but also 5 poor performances where they were held to 100 yards or less. They dropped to 160 (4.4) and allowed 33 sacks (7.5%). This year they lose 1st Team All-MVFC LG Zeveyon Furcron and RT Lucas Davis (13 st). Three starters are back and Calvin Harris started the first 5 last year before an injury ended his season. He moves to OG this season they have 4 experienced starters.

DEFENSIVE LINE- In spring of '21 SIU's run D went from 154 ypg allowed (4.0) in '19 to 204 (5.2) and sacks dropped from 39 to 13! The Saluki's had two DL named Preseason All-MVFC last year so improvement was expected. They allowed 179 (4.3) and sacks jumped back up to 35 yet they actually dropped in the conference from 7th to 9th in Rush ypg allowed. This year they lose all 4 starters. Gone are 3rd Team All-MVFC DE Anthony Knighton who led with 11 tfl's (13 st, #8 tkl'r, 5 pd), 4th Team All-MVFC DE Jordan Berner (10 st, #12 tkl'r) and DT Kevin Glajchen (11 st, #14 tkl'r) who co-led with 6 sacks and DT Gian Belizaire (10 st, #15 tkl'r, 3 tfl). They get their #10, #16 and #18 tkl'r's back and they add PS#133 TX A&M transfer RJ Orebo and JMU transfer Zaid Hamdan (Orig Ohio St). This unit was the key to their success last year as all 4 games they allowed over 200 rush yards they also allowed at least 31 points so this is their biggest concern on D.

LINEBACKERS- In '19 Mikel Calhoun led the Salukis with 7 sacks and was their #5 tackler. They lost their #2 and #11 tacklers heading into spring. Bryce Notree was #2 with 63 tkl's. Calhoun dropped to just 2 sacks (#7 tkl'r). Last year their #1 tkl'r departed. Notree had 4 sacks, 4 tfl's, 2 int's and 4 pbu's. He led with 90 tackles and was 2nd Team All-MVFC. This year they lose Notree, Kholbe Coleman (2 st, #9 tkl'r) and two backups (1 st, 28 tkl). They get their #4, #6, #11 and #13 tkl'r's back. Calhoun leads the unit after posting 4 sacks last year. They add transfers transfer Nick Okeke (Lville, 115 tkl, 6.5 tfl 4Y), George Douglas (CMich, PS#233, 22 car st, 112 tkl 4Y), Leslie Smith (Pitt, PS#232, 6 tkl LY) and Chris Harris (GA Sthn, PS#225, 10 st, 89 tkl 3Y). The transfers make this a vastly more experienced unit and the most improved on D.

DEFENSIVE BACKS- SIU allowed 201 pass ypg in '19 and finished 6th in pass D efficiency (60%, 18-9). In spring they improved to 185 ypg and 58.8% (12-5) but dropped to 8th in the Pass D rankings. Last year they lost preseason 1st Team All-MVFC CB James Caesar after just 2 games. They still only gave up 185 pass ypg but jumped to 16 int's against 16 td's (60.8%) and finished 3rd in the Pass D Efficiency rankings. Three DB's tied for the lead with 3 int's including Casesar's replacement David Miller (Navy transfer). This year they lose 1st Team All-MVFC SS Qua Brown (13 st, #2 tkl'r, 3 int) and a backup (14 tkl) but the rest of the unit returns including preseason all-conference selections CB PJ Jules (1st tm, #3 tkl'r, 7 pd) and S Clayton Bush (Orig WKU, 2nd Tm, #5 tkl'r, 3 int). Memphis transfer LAAndre Thomas started 14 games in '19. This is one of the top secondaries in the Valley.

SPECIAL TEAMS- Last year Nico Gualdoni made 18-23 and made all 3 from 50+ (L/55). Jack Colquhoun averaged 43.7 (40.7 net). DJ Williams had a 6.3 PR avg and Izaia Hartup averaged 22.2 KR. Both Gualdoni and Colquhoun depart so this unit is down quite a bit.

COACHES- Nick Hill was OC/QB Coach here before being promoted in '16. He was a 2 year starting QB here in '06-'07. The 4th year OC, Blake Rolan was WR Coach at Cincy from '13-'16 and an analyst at Tennessee and Kentucky. 4th Year DC Jason Petrino was DC at South Dakota from '12-'15 and HC at NAIA Rocky Mountain for 3 years. The new ST's Coor is Dalmin Gibson who was a ST's analyst at Mich St the last 2 years.

FORECAST

OFFENSE- In HC Hill's two years as OC SIU averaged 29 ppg/380 ypg then 36 ppg/498 ypg. They put up 31 ppg/470 ypg in his first year as HC but dropped to 27 ppg/400 ypg in '17 and only put up 23 ppg against Valley foes. In '18 they got back to 30 ppg/431 ypg but still only 25 ppg/390 ypg vs Valley foes. They had two 1,000 yd rushers in '19 and put up 28 ppg/417 ypg and in the spring dropped to 27 ppg and 23 ppg vs MVFC foes. Last year they had 10 starters back and averaged 31 ppg and 415 ypg. This has been a consistent offense under Hill. They have 7 starters back including QB Baker, a loaded RB group, a 1st Team Preseason All MVFC WR and 3 OL starters. They were 4th in Total and Scoring offense last year and this should be one of Hill's better groups.

DEFENSE- In 2019 SIU was 7th in Total D (355 ypg) and 6th in scoring D (23 ppg). They had 8 of their top 12 tacklers going but fell to 7th in Total D in spring of '21 (389 ypg) and 8th in Scoring D (30 ppg) but also had to play National Title Runner-Up South Dakota St twice. Last year they had 14 of their top 16 tacklers back. They improved to 25.8 ppg and 365 ypg but still only finished 7th in both Scoring and Total D. This year they only have 5 starters back and return 11 of their top 20. Their #1 and #2 tacklers are gone but reloaded with experienced transfers at LB. They have one of the top secondaries in the Valley and if their DLine can avoid a regression then they will be better than last year.

2022- In '18 SIU went just 2-9 and were -94 ypg in Valley play. Their defense improved by almost 3 td's per game in '19 and after starting just 2-4, they won 5 straight before losing their finale to North Dakota St 21-7. They finished 7-5 and were +62 ypg and +71 vs Valley foes. In spring of '21 HC Hill led SIU to the FCS Playoffs for the first time since 2009. They started 4-1 before losing to South Dakota St 44-3 then were +54 yards but lost to Missouri St 30-27. They beat SELA by 7 and won at Weber St 34-31 to earn the playoff spot. SIU drew South Dakota St for a 2nd meeting and led 20-7 2Q but didn't score again until 5:37 4Q and lost to the eventual FCS Runner-Up 31-26. Last year SIU had 18 starters back. They started 6-1 and only lost to Kansas St 31-23. SIU led #16 NIU 13-3 2Q but lost 23-16, allowing the GW td with 2:27 left then was SOD at the NIU14. After a 10 point loss to #17 Missouri St they soundly beat Indiana St then were surprisingly blown out by YSU on Senior Day 35-18. They beat South Dakota 22-10 but were no match for eventual Nat'l Champs North Dakota St and lost 38-7 to finish 8-5 and +50 ypg. 12 starters return. They were +8 TO's last year and were even in ypg vs Conference foes last year. SIU was picked to finish 4th by the Media. They miss SDSU and Indiana St in conference play. SIU hosts NDSU and NIU. They have a tough non-conf game at Northwestern but could start 4-1 before traveling to Missouri St. The Salukis only National Title came in 1983. We aren't ready to call them contenders quite yet but we do think a 3rd straight playoff berth is a strong possibility.