

# JACKSONVILLE ST

## POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

**QUARTERBACKS** -Zerrick Cooper (orig Clemson PS#271) returned to JSU in 2020 after setting a JSU record with 32 td passes in 2019. In the fall of 2020 the offense put up just 359 ypg in the 4 games and the bad news for JSU was that QB Cooper was OFY (ankle) against FIU and missed the spring season. Cooper finished with 671 pass yds (67%, 1-1). In the spring of '21 Zion Webb took over as the starter and the Gamecocks offense put up 414 ypg and 29 ppg in OVC play. For the season Webb finished with 1,777 pass yds (58%, 13-8) showed dual-threat ability as he ran for 399 (5.4, 5 td) and was 1st Team OVC. Last fall Cooper was back healthy and early on in the season threw for 242 yds & 2 td's in an upset with at Florida St. After missing the next game Cooper came back & threw for 318 vs UT Martin. Cooper did have accuracy issues at times and had 3 games of 50% completions or less. Overall he threw for 2137 yards (54%, 13-9) and ran for 140 yards (1.6) and was 3rd Tm ASUN. The backup was Matthew Caldwell (1 st, 136 yds, 47%, 0-1) and he returns this season along with Webb, who missed all LY recovering from a torn ACL. If Webb can get back to his spring '21 form post-injury, this unit will still be in good shape entering '22.

**RUNNING BACKS** - JSU had a strong rush attack in the '20-'21 season as they were led by 2nd Team OVC RB Josh Samuel (7 st, 773, 5.6, 8) and Uriah West (7 st, 687, 5.0, 8 td) as well as Pat Jackson (369, 4.0). The top 3 RB's all returned last fall & this unit looked to be in excellent shape. Samuel topped 100 yards in 4 games last season and was again the #1 rusher for JSU with 714 yards (10st, 5.6, 6 td) and also had 282 rec yards (13.4) and was 1st Tm ASUN. West was again the #2 rusher with 373 yards (3 st, 6.5) while Ron Wiggins emerged as the new #3 rusher (2 st, 254, 5.9). This year JSU returns both Samuel and Wiggins, and they also get back Jackson (60 yds LY) along with Matt LaRoche (105, 9.5). With 5 of the top 6 RB's set to return in '22, this unit is primed to have another successful season.

**RECEIVERS** - The leading receiver for the '20-'21 season was TE Trae Barry (10 st, 534, 16.2) while Dave Russell was #2 with 352 yds (12 st, 13.5, 3 td) and Ahmed Edwards finished as the #3 receiver (9 st, 284, 16.7, 2nd Team OVC). Overall 4 of the top 7 receivers were back last fall, and the biggest losses were TE Barry (1st Team OVC) and Logan McVay (8 st, 181, 12.9). Last season PJ Wells emerged as the top receiver, leading with 574 yards (15.5) and was 1st Tm ASUN. Right behind Wells was Edwards with 561 yards (12.5, 5 td) and he was 2nd Tm ASUN. RB Samuel was #3 and TE Sean Brown was #4 (8 st, 192, 14.8, 2nd Tm ASUN). This season 7 of the top 8 receivers return, with the lone loss being Duke transfer Damond Philyaw-Johnson (3 st, 143, 15.9). Alongside Wells and Edwards, we expect former Wash St WR Michael Pettway (121, 9.3 in 4 gms LY) to make a bigger impact. They also add ECU WR TJ Lockley. The is plenty of experience in this unit & we expect them to potentially have even a better season than last fall.

**OFFENSIVE LINE** - The JSU OLine paved the way for 189 rush ypg (4.6) and allowed 18 sks in the '20-'21 season with 11 of those sacks coming in 3 games. All 7 players who started a game on the OLine returned last fall, which included LG Cam Hill (1st Team OVC), LT Tylan Grable (1st Team OVC) and C Zack Cangelosi (2nd Team OVC). Despite the experienced OLine returning, JSU's rushing totals dropped to 151 ypg (4.5) but they allowed 19 sacks (5.3%) with 11 of those sacks coming in 3 games. This season they do lose 1st Tm ASUN LT Tylan Grable (7 st) along with a pair of backups who combined for 6 starts. However, they return 1st Tm ASUN C Zack Cangelosi (10 st), 2nd Tm ASUN RT Ye'Majesty Sanders (10 st). Overall JSU returns 8 players who started a game on the OLine including 4 starters, and with 5 of the top 6 RB's returning, this OLine should definitely show improvement this season in the run game.

**DEFENSIVE LINE** - The Gamecocks strong defense in the '20-'21 season started with their strong DLine, as they allowed just 92 rush ypg (2.6) including allowing just 48 rush ypg (1.7) against OVC foes! They also collected 28 sks for the season. The DLine was led by DE's DJ Coleman (13 st, 55 tkl, 8.5 sk, 3 tfl, 1st Team OVC) and Umstead Sanders (13 st, 39 tkl, 5.5 tfl, 2nd Team OVC). Chris Hardie (2 st, 34 tkl, 7 sk, 4 tfl) and NT Anthony Nesby (7 st, 20 tkl, 3 tfl) were strong players up the middle. Those 4 players all were back last fall, but the run defense took a step back as they gave up 158 rush ypg (4.2) and the Gamecocks recorded just 18 sacks, with 6 coming in the L/2 games. Coleman led the unit in tackles (11 st, 55 tfl, 3 sk) and was 1st Tm ASUN. Sanders also had a productive season (11 st, 44 tkl, 5.5 tfl) and was 3rd Tm ASUN. Both Coleman and Sanders are gone this season along with Nahum Horton (2 st, 22 tkl, 3 sk). JSU gets back Chris Hardie (6 st, 25 tkl, 4 tfl), Jackson Luttrell (4 st, 21 tkl, 2 tfl) and Anthony Nesby (9 st, 15 tkl, 1.5 tfl), and they also add Kansas St transfer Brayden Wood (PS#115). Overall this unit is in decent shape, but losing 2 All-ASUN players hurts.

**LINEBACKERS** - JSU had a talented group of LB's in the '20-'21 season and the #1 tackler was Marshall Clark (13 st, 85 tkl, 10.5 tfl, 2nd Team OVC) and Markail Benton came on as the starter mid-season and finished as the #3 tkl'r (6 st, 2.5 tfl, 2nd Team OVC). Stevonte Tullis would finish the season as the starter at NB and collected 44 tkl (5 st, 3.5 tfl, 4 pbu). Clark and Benton returned last season as did Tullis. The defense allowed 393 ypg and 28 ppg. Benton led JSU with 69 tackles (8 st, 6.5 tfl) and was 1st Tm ASUN while Tullis was the #2 tackler (8 st, 68 tkl, 6.5, 3 pbu) and was also 1st Tm ASUN. Both Benton and Tullis are again back, but they do lose Marshall Clark (5 st, 52 tkl). This unit brings back 3 of the top 4 tacklers and should again be a stout unit.

**DEFENSIVE BACKS** - The JSU secondary improved to allowing 190 pass ypg in '20-'21 & they all'd opposing QB's to hit 55% for the season. This unit was led by OVC DPOY S Nico Harper who had 92 tkl's (12 st, 2.5 tfl, 3 pbu, 3 int). The other S was Jeremiah Harris (9 st, 66 tkl, 3 tfl, 2 pbu) and Jacquez Payton (11 st, 30 tkl, 10 pbu, 3 int) held down one of the CB spots. Yul Gowdy began the season starting at CB but was OFY after 5 games and George Steele started L/7 games (32 tkl, 3 pbu). The lone starter not back last season was CB Payton (2nd Team OVC) but this unit had good depth. Last season JSU allowed 235 pass ypg (58%) but they only collected 8 int's. Harper was the unit's top tackler (7 st, 54 tkl, 2 int) and was 1st Tm ASUN. Kobi Fuqua (8 st, 47 tkl, 5.5 tfl), Malik Feaster (3 st, 42 tkl, 6 pbu, 2 int), Yessman Green (4 st, 41 tkl, 3.5 tfl, 3 pbu), and Jamari Jemison (6 st, 28 tkl, 2 pbu) all were a key part of this unit and while Harper and Feaster depart, the other 3 all return along with Gowdy (6 st, 20 tkl, 3 pbu) and Marco Baker (7 st, 12 tkl, 3 pbu). With 8 of the top 10 back, we see this secondary making an improvement in 2022.

**SPECIAL TEAMS** - Last season JSU returned K Alen Karajic, who hit 14-19 fg's in '20-'21 (L/46) with 2 of those misses getting blocked. Karajic connected on 7-12 fg's (L/46, 1 blk'd) last season. Jack Dawson was the main punter for JSU in '20-'21 and he averaged 41.8 yds per punt (131/20, long of 61) and the team had a net of 38.2 yds. Dawson last season averaged 41.9 yards per punt and had a net of 36.9 yards. Last season CB Gowdy led JSU with 200 KR yards (20.0) and JSU had 88 PR yards all season. This unit returns completely intact and should have a better season.

**COACHES** - John Grass went 72-26 (49-9 conf) in 8 seasons here, but resigned toward the end of last season. In steps Rich Rodriguez, who was the HC at West Virginia (2001-07), Michigan (2008-2010) and Arizona (2012-2017). Last season Rodriguez spent the season at ULM as the OC. Rod Smith is the new OC and QB coach at Jacksonville St. He was the OC and QB coach at Illinois from 2018-2020 and spent 2021 at Virginia as an analyst. Smith played QB for Rodriguez at Glenville St from 1993-96. Zac Alley takes over as the new DC here. Alley spent last season as the DC and

DLine coach at ULM. Alley was the youngest DC in the FBS when he took over at ULM in 2021 at the age of 28. Alley spent 2019-20 as the co-ST coordinator & OLB coach at Boise St. Pat Kirkland is the new ST coach and he comes here after spending 10 seasons as the HC at the University of Charleston in W.Virginia.

## FORECAST

**OFFENSE** - In 2017 JSU's offense averaged 369 ypg and 29 ppg. JSU's offense in 2018 was in the top 5 in total yards per game (497 ypg) and top 10 in points per game (40 ppg)! In 2019 the offense returned 9 starters but the numbers did drop to 419 ypg and 27 ppg as they lost QB Cooper for the season. In the fall 2020/spring 2021 season the Gamecocks 384 ypg and 28 ppg. This season they lose QB Cooper but Zion Webb, who started in the '20-'21 season, returns off a knee injury. With 9 starters back overall this offense could come close to the 400 ypg mark if Webb can lead the offense like he did 2 season's ago.

**DEFENSE** - In 2017 the Gamecocks allowed just 240 ypg! In '18 the JSU defense allowed 311 ypg, but allowed over 20 ppg (25 ppg) for the first time since '14. JSU brought back 6 starters on defense in '19 but would allow 380 ypg (most since 2012) and 28 ppg. Last season after allowing 531 yds to Florida St in the opener JSU's defense would give up just 229 ypg over their next 8 games & the most yds they allowed in that span was 287 yds to Mercer. For the season the JSU defense gave up 283 ypg and 18 ppg. The JSU defense took a step back last season as they allowed 393 ypg and 28 ppg. The only big losses for the JSU defense this season are 2 starting DL and a starting DB. With 8 starters back this unit should show some improvement, but they are learning a new defensive scheme.

**2022** - Jacksonville St was in the Ohio Valley Conference from 2003-2020, and won at least a share of the OVC title 9 times and made it all the way to the FCS title game in 2015. Last season JSU moved to the Atlantic Sun conference, but this is their final year as an FCS member, as they will be moving to Conference USA in 2023. JSU only plays 4 home games this season and they open the season against 2 straight playoff teams from last year (SF Austin, Davidson). JSU then has 3 road games in 3 weeks before facing another playoff team from LY in Kennesaw St. Two of their final three games are on the road and this schedule has its challenges. While they have a new HC, he has plenty of experience and with 17 starters back JSU should be competitive in the ASUN and could even win the conference if they can remain healthy & the new systems click.