

# SAM HOUSTON STATE

## POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

**QUARTERBACKS** - Eric Schmid threw for 2,808 yards (59%, 20-9) in 10 games in the spring of '21 and he also ran for 436 (4.4) and 8 td's & was Southland Player of the Year! Schmid was back for the fall '21 season and was backed up by Keegan Shoemaker, who transferred in from Lafayette where he was the Patriot League Rookie of the Year in '19 (2545, 60%, 14-14, 348 rush, 2.5). Schmid started 11 games and topped 250 yds in a game 5 times incl 392 (61%) vs EKU and 354 (69%, 2-3) in the playoff loss to Montana St. Overall Schmid threw for 2818 yds (58.6%, 29-10) and ran for 343 (3.9, 6 td) and was 1st Tm All-WAC. Shoemaker got 1 start (vs SF Austin) and on the year threw for 294 yds (54.8%, 3-1). Trapper Pannell was also used as mainly the running QB (162 rush, 9.5). Schmid departs as the #3 all-time passer here & #3 all-time in td passes here. Shoemaker & Pannell return, but the loss of an all-conference QB likely means this unit will take a step back in '22.

**RUNNINGBACKS** - 2nd Tm Southland RB Ramon Jefferson led the Bearkats in rushing in the spring of '21 as he totaled 752 (6.0) and 7 td's while backup Noah Smith put up 133 (3.8) & also had 28 rec for 261 yds. Both Jefferson and Smith returned in the fall of '21. Jefferson opened the season with 3 straight 100 yd games and overall topped 100 yds 6 times during the season & finished with 1155 yds (6.7, 13 td) and was 3rd Tm AA and 1st Tm WAC! Smith started 4 gms and was #2 with 567 (6.4, 6 td) and was 3rd Tm All-WAC. Jefferson transfers out this season and Smith is now listed as a WR, so the leading returnee at RB is Zach Hrbacek (161, 7.3) and Weston Stephens returns too (147, 5.9). They add Dezmon Jackson (PS#52JC) from Okla St (139, 2.9 in '21) who should be a factor, and will need a new face to emerge if they are to put up similar numbers.

**RECEIVERS** - In spring of '21 Jaquez Ezzard led the receivers (10 st, 861, 22.7, 9 td, 1st Tm Southland) along with Ife Adeyi (10 st, 588, 19.6, 3 td, 2nd Tm Southland) and Cody Chrest (8 st, 463, 11.3). In the fall of '21 all 3 starting WR's and starting TE Isaac Schley (8 st, 191, 11.9, 2nd Tm Southland) returned & overall 6 of the top 7 receivers were back in the fall. Adeyi took over as the top guy (11 st, 742, 13.7, 10 td) while Cody Chrest was #2 (11 st, 704, 13.0) and Ezzard was #3 with 609 yds (14.9). SHSt loses Ezzard (9 st) and Chandler Harvin (330, 14.4) along with starting TE Isaac Schley (142, 10.1), but returns their top 2 receivers in Adeyi & Chrest and RB Smith (222 rec, 9.3) moves to WR. Overall 6 of the top 10 receivers are back for the Bearkats in '22 and should still have a productive season.

**OFFENSIVE LINE** - The OLine paved the way for 159 rush ypg (4.5) for the spring '21 season, but SHSt ran for 187 ypg (4.8) vs conference foes & just 117 ypg (3.8) in 4 playoff games. The OLine did allow just 17 sks on 334 pass attempts (5.1%) but 8 of those sks allowed came in the playoffs. Going into the fall his unit returned all 7 players that started a game in the spring including 1st Tm Southland C/G Colby Thomas, 2nd Tm Southland LG Prince Pines and 2nd Tm Southland C Ethan Hagler. The same starting 5 started all 12 games and this continuity led to SHSt rushing for 230 ypg (5.8) and the OLine gave up just 14 sacks (3.4%) with 4 of those sacks coming in their playoff loss to Montana St. This unit loses RG Thomas (3rd Tm AA), LG Pines (1st Tm WAC), TXSt transfer RT Reece Jordan (1st Tm WAC) and LT Eleasah Anderson (2nd Tm WAC). C Hagler (2nd Tm WAC) is the lone starter back, and they do add Jordan Boatman (2 career sts) from Houston. However, with the loss of 4 All-WAC players on the OLine, this unit may struggle early on as they build chemistry.

**DEFENSIVE LINE** - The DLine for SHSt held conference foes to just 52 rush ypg (1.7) but gave up 160 rush ypg (3.7) in the playoffs in the spring of '21. For the season the Bearkats defense did collect 37 sks. The DLine was led by DE Jahari Kay (10 st, 38 tkl, 6 sk, 7.5 tfl) along with NT Joseph Wallace (10 st, 2.5 sk, 6 tfl) and DL Jevon Leon (22 tkl, 4 sk). The top 5 tkl'rs on the DLine returned last year for SHSt and against conference foes they were again strong, allowing just 65 rush ypg (2.3) but allowed 309 rush yds in 2 playoff games and the sack total dropped to 26. SHSt loses all 3 DLine starters in 2nd Tm AA DE Kay (11 st, 34 tkl, 6.5 sk, 6 tfl), 2nd Tm WAC DT Trace Mascorro (11 st, 23 tkl, 3.5 sk), and Wallace (12 st, 25 tkl, 3 sk). They also lose Scean Mustin (1 st, 14 tkl, 4.5 sk) and their top returning DL is Jevon Leon (1 st, 31 tkl, 6.5 tfl). They do add Ellison Hubbard from Colorado St, who has 20 career starts (67 tkl, 5 tfl), but this unit loses a lot of experience & will likely not match their impressive rush totals allowed the past few seasons.

**LINEBACKERS** - In the spring of '21 the LB corps was led by Trevor Williams (10 st, 88 tkl, 3 sk, 12 tfl, 5 pbu, 2nd Tm Southland), Quentin Brown (9 st, 63 tkl, 4 sk, 5 tfl, 1st Tm Southland) and Markel Perry (10 st, 40 tkl, 6.5 sk, 6.5 tfl, 2nd Tm Southland). The LB corps returned the top 7 tkl'rs entering the fall of '21 and this unit helped spearhead a defense that held foes to 42 ypg under their season average & allowing 346 ypg and 21 ppg. T.Williams again led SHSt in tackles (78 tkl, 5.5 tfl, 1st Tm WAC) while Tim Hart was t-#3 tkl'r (50 tkl, 3 tfl) and Perry was 1st Tm WAC (12 st, #5 tkl'r, 10 tfl, 5 sk). SHSt loses Hart (12 st), and bkps Q. Brown (22 tkl), and Danzell Sims (20 tkl). However Williams and Perry return along with Trey Fields (25 tkl) and Jaylen Phillips (12 tkl). They also return all 3 players started at NB led by Isaiah Downes (6 st, 19 tkl) and If a LB can step up & replace Hart this unit could be just as solid this season.

**DEFENSIVE BACKS** - Against conference foes in the spring of '21 SHSt allowed 307 pass ypg but that number dropped to just 195 pass ypg allowed in the playoffs. The SHSt secondary was led by FS Braiden Clopton (9 st, 72 tkl, 3 tfl), SS Tristian McCollum (9 st, 50 tkl, 2 pbu, 2 int, 2nd Tm Southland) and CB Zyon McCollum (10 st, 46 tkl, 6 pbu, 1st Tm Southland). The SHSt secondary brought back their top 8 tkl'rs. Over their F/6 gms SHSt all'd 222 pass ypg, but over the final 6 gms they all'd 301 ypg incl giving up 481 to Incarnate Word in the playoffs. SHSt did collect 13 int's on the year. S T.McCollum led the way (1st Tm WAC, 12 st, #2 tkl'r, 6 pbu) and CB's Z.McCollum (3rd Tm AA, 12 st, t-#3 tkl'r, 5 pbu, 3 int) and Jaylen Thomas (3rd Tm WAC, 11 st, #6 tkl'r, 6 pbu, 3 int) both had stellar years. The bad news is that those 3 starters depart along with S Clopton (9 st, #7 tkl, 2 pbu), which leaves S Darell Hawkins-Williams as the top DB back (2 st, 32 tkl) and Kameryn Alexander (1 st, 18 tkl, 6 pbu, 2 int) will be the top CB. This unit also adds BJ Foster (PS#5!) from Texas (27 st, 168 tkl, 11 pbu 5 int in 4Y) and will be a huge addition! However, with 4 starters gone this unit may take some time to gel but may not fall off too much.

**SPECIAL TEAMS** - Last fall SHSt brought back K Seth Morgan (12-14 fg in spring) and he went 8-12 on fg's (L/50), P Matt McRobert returned in the fall of '21 and avg'd 45.4 yds per punt (39.9 net) and was 2nd Tm WAC. DB Alexander avg'd 19.4 yds per KR, while WR Ezzard avg'd 10.3 PR yds. Morgan & Alexander are back but they do lose an All-Conf P, and will need to find a solid replacement for him if this unit is remain steady.

**COACHES** - KC Keeler took over Sam Houston St in 2014 and enters year 9 in Huntsville. In his 8 previous seasons Keeler has guided the Bearkats to the playoffs 6 times, and won the national championship in the spring season of 2021. Before SHSt Keeler spent 11 seasons at Delaware, leading them to the playoffs 4 times including the national championship in 2003. The new offensive coordinator is John Perry, who spent the '21 season as an offensive asst for Rutgers. Prior to that Perry spent

7 seasons with the Houston Texans, with the final 4 coming as the WR coach. Clayton Carlin enters year 6 as the DC. Prior to joining the staff at SHSt, Carlin spent the previous 4 seasons at Coastal Carolina as the DC. Zach Milliet is the Special Teams Analyst.

## FORECAST

**OFFENSE** - In 2018 the Bearkats offense put up 296 pass ypg and in '19 that number dipped slightly to 281 ypg. In the spring of '21 against Southland foes the SHSt pass offense put up 338 ypg, but that number dipped to 197 pass ypg in the 4 playoff games. Overall they averaged 440 ypg and 38 ppg. Last fall with a full compliment of starters back, the SHSt offense put up 491 ypg and 41 ppg! However, with major losses up front on the OLine and the loss of the #3 all-time passer here, we have a tough time seeing the offense coming close to matching last fall's output.

**DEFENSE** - Coming into the 2019 season Sam Houston had not fielded a defense that held foes to under 400 ypg since 2012. However, in 2019 the Bearkats allow nearly 100 ypg less (330) and they held foes to just 18 ppg (gave up 28 ppg in '18). The numbers held fairly steady in the spring of '21, as they gave up 357 ypg/20 ppg. The experienced Bearkats defense allowed roughly the same numbers in the fall of '21 (346 ypg/21 ppg). However, with all 4 secondary starters and all 3 DLine starters gone, we think the defense may not be as strong as years past, but they did add some transfers that could help this unit greatly.

**2022** - SHSt opens at Texas A&M but then hosts Northern Arizona and Texas A&M Commerce before traveling to Incarnate Word and Stephen F Austin, who both made the playoffs last season and SHSt defeated Incarnate Word in the second round of the playoffs in a 49-42 game. After the homecoming game vs Abilene Christian, SHSt finishes up their season with 4 of their final 5 games on the road. KC Keeler is a veteran HC and we expect him to get the most out of his team this season, but with only 6 starters back & losses at several key spots, this team may miss out on the playoffs for just the 3rd time in 9 seasons under Keeler.