

TENNESSEE ST TIGERS

POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

QUARTERBACKS - Isaiah Green was the main starting QB for the Tigers in the spring of '21 and he threw for just 916 yds (58%, 2-2) in 5 starts, while Deveon Bryant started a pair of games and hit just 32% (18-56) for 256 yds and a 2-1 ratio. Bryant also ran for 190 yards. Last fall Green didn't return, but Bryant was back, and they also added Grambling QB Jeremy Hickbottom who would go on to be the starter. Hickbottom threw for 1,847 yards (10 st, 57.6%, 12-4) and was also the #2 rusher with 261 yards (3.8, 7 td) and was 3rd Tm OVC. Bryant was the backup last fall and threw for 256 (47.6%, 0-1) while Chayil Garnett started 1 game (137, 54.3%, 1-1). Both Bryant and Chayil return, while Hickbottom departs. The Tigers do add former Austin Peay QB Draylin Ellis, who played in 10 games last fall (started 8 games) and finished with 2,626 pass yds (54.2%, 19-8) and was 2nd Tm OVC. The addition of Ellis gives this unit a talent upgrade and should help propel the offense.

RUNNING BACKS - Devon Starling led the Tigers in rushing in the spring of '21 with 648 yds (5.2). Last season Starling returned and was the starter for all 11 games. Starling ran for 800 yards (4.4) and the #2 RB Jalen Rouse, ran for 146 yards (3.4). Both Starling and Rouse return this season, and with the workhorse of the unit back, we expect a better season from this rushing attack, they'll just need some depth to form behind the top guy.

RECEIVERS - The Tigers put up 167 pass ypg in the spring '21 season, and Cam Wyche was the top receiver (7 st, 22 rec, 456 yds, 2nd Tm OVC) and Daryon Johnson (5 st, 18 rec, 263 yds) was the #2 receiver. Overall 5 players topped 100 yds receiving in the spring for TSU and they all returned last fall. The leading receiver in the fall was TE Rodell Rahman (484, 16.7, 6 td) while RB Starling was #2 (312, 8.4) and the top WR was D. Johnson (311, 14.1). Overall 7 receivers topped 100 yards last fall and 6 of them return this season including Johnson, Gerand Turner (250, 17.9) and Wyche (236, 13.1). With a more-talented QB taking over & this unit returning quite a bit of experience, we look for an improved year from the Tigers receivers in 2022.

OFFENSIVE LINE - The OLine struggled to open holes consistently for the run game in the spring of '21, and the Tigers OLine also gave up 19 sacks on 190 pass attempts (10%!). The good news for the Tigers OLine going into the fall of '21 is that every player who started a game in the spring was back. The Tigers rush attack had an up and down year. In the F/4 games they were held to under 115 yards in 3 games, but the other game ran for 271 yds vs D-II Kentucky St. In games 5-8 TSU ran for 153 ypg (4.8), then in games 9-11 they only ran for 61 ypg (2.1). Overall TSU's OLine paved the way for 115 ypg (3.5) and they allowed 28 sacks (8.8%) and 8 sacks came in one game against Jackson St. This season the Tigers return four starters on the OLine including 1st Tm LG Robert Lacey and 4th Tm OVC LT Jaalon Gupton. The lone starter lost is 4th Tm OVC C Jeremiah Frazier, but they do add Christopher Georgia from Murray St who started 11 games for the Racers LY at RG. This unit looks to be in solid shape entering 2022 and will likely pave the way for better rush numbers.

DEFENSIVE LINE - The DLine in the spring of '21 gave up 194 ypg (5.1) including 325 yards (7.6) to Jacksonville St and 250 yards (6.1) to Austin Peay. They also collected 16 sks in 7 gms including 5 against EIU. Along with Davoan Hawkins (7 st, 32 tkl, 5 sk, 4 tfl) who was 1st Tm OVC this unit returned every DLine player that started a game last spring for TSU returned last fall. The run defense allowed over 200 rush yards in 3 games & in the other 8 games they allowed just 105 rush ypg (3.4)! TSU also recorded 19 sacks but 16 of those sacks came in 4 games. DE Tadarrius Patterson led the DLine with 31 tackles (11 st, 6 sk) and was 4th Tm OVC while Hawkins finished with 29 tackles (11 st, 4.5 tfl). They both return this season along with DT Terray Jones (11 st, 28 tkl, 3 sk). The lone starter gone on the DLine is NT Raymond Horton (11 st, 28 tkl, 3.5 tfl). Overall 5 of the top 6 DL return this season we expect the run defense to be stout again and they should improve on their sack total.

LINEBACKERS - The Tigers LB corps returned all starters last fall from a unit that helped the Tigers defense allow 387 ypg in the spring of '21. This unit was solid again for the Tigers as James Green led with 77 tackles (11 st, 7 tfl, 1 int) and was 2nd Tm OVC. Jahsun Bryant was the #4 tackler (9 st, 62 tkl, 3 pbu) and NB Ken Garlington was t-#6 tackler (11 st, 2 tfl, 3 pbu). All 3 starters return this season and backups Maruice McDonald (23 tkl) and Kendall Johnson (19 tkl) are also back. The Tigers have a ton of experience at LB and paired with an exp'd DLine should have a productive front line.

DEFENSIVE BACKS - FS Josh Green (7 st, 39 tkl, 4 pbu, 3 int, 2nd Tm OVC) and CB Nick Harper (7 st, 32 tkl, 6 pbu) helped lead the TSU pass defense allow 193 pass ypg & held opposing QB's to 56% completions in the spring '21 season. Last fall the secondary returned every starter and they allowed 208 pass ypg and 54.2% completions and TSU had 9 int's on the season. This unit was led by safeties Cory Rahman (11 st, 65 tkl, 5.5, 4 pbu, 2 int) and J. Green (11 st, 63 tkl, 2 tfl, 5 pbu). Rahman departs this season (3rd Tm OVC) along with CB Eddie Graham (10 st, 35 tkl, 5 pbu, 2 int). J. Green and CB De'Amare Chambers (11 st, 25 tkl, 4 pbu) are the two starters back. With a pair of starters back this secondary is in solid shape, but need a pair of starters to emerge if they are to match last season's production.

SPECIAL TEAMS - Antonio Zita hit 20-24 fg's in '19 (L/50) and then last spring Zita connected on 14-21 fg's (2 blk'd) with a long of 62 yards! Last fall Zita was back was just 8-16 on fg's (L/39). Kaleb Mosley avg'd 42.2 yds per punt (36.2 net) in 2019 and last spring Mosley averaged 40.1 yds per punt (37.3 net). Mosley was back again last fall and averaged 41.6 yds per punt (2 blk'd) with a 33.7 net. WR Dayron Johnson (251 KR yds, 98 PR yds) was the leading return man in the spring of '21 and was back in the fall and led with 451 KR yds (22.6, 1 td) and 156 PR yds. K Zita departs, but P Mosley returns along with return man Johnson & James Lowery (2-2 fg LY) could take over as the K and this unit looks to be in good shape entering '22.

COACHES - The Tennessee St program made a big hire when they made Eddie George as the next head coach in the fall of 2021. George played college football at Ohio St and won the 1995 Heisman Trophy after rushing for 1,927 yards (5.9) and 24 td. George was an all-pro RB in Tennessee & finished his NFL career with 10,441 yards and 68 rushing td. The new OC is Theron Achy, who was

the WR coach at UTEP in 2021 and before that spent 2017-20 at Arizona as the WR/TE coach. Brandon Fisher enters his 2nd season as the DC for Tennessee St. Prior to TSU Fisher was a DEF analyst at Auburn in 2020 and was the DC at Southern Utah in 2019. Fisher also spent 2015-17 as the secondary coach for the NFL's St.Louis/LA Rams. Keith Burns is the ST coordinator for TSU.

FORECAST

OFFENSE - TSU's offense dipped to 326 ypg and 24 ppg in 2017, but with 8 starters back on offense those numbers jumped back up to 432 ypg and 29 ppg in 2018. In 2019 the offense still managed to put up 400 ypg but the ppg dipped a bit to 26. Last spring the offense averaged just 301 ypg and 18 ppg, but returned an experienced unit in the fall, yet the offensive numbers only jumped to 318 ypg and 20 ppg. This season 9 starters return and bring in Austin Peay QB Draylin Ellis (2nd Tm OVC LY) so we expect the offense to make a good jump in production this season.

DEFENSE - In 2017 the TSU defense allowed just 278 ypg and 20 ppg. In '18 TSU had to deal with injuries and this led to them allowing 430 ypg and 32 ppg in 2018. In '19 TSU's defense took another step back as they allowed 455 ypg and 35 ppg. Last spring the defense showed a little improvement as they allowed 387 ypg but only cut the ppg allowed to 31. The Tigers returned all starters on defense last fall and they improved again to allowing 365 ypg and 27 ppg, but allowed foes to gain 33 ypg above their season average. This season 11 of the top 15 tacklers are back including 8 starters and we expect the Tigers defense to have another solid season.

2022 - Since reaching the FCS Playoffs back in '13, TSU has gone 8 seasons without making it back to the postseason. Last fall TSU opened with 2 neutral site losses to Grambling St and Jackson St and after a win vs a D-II school lost the OVC opener 47-14 to SEMO. After that TSU won 4 straight games vs OVC foes, but then dropped their final 2 OVC games and then were blown out by Miss St (-395 yds). TSU was -47 ypg and -7 ppg last season and the offense was held to 61 ypg under what their foes typically allowed. This season TSU does return 17 starters and are in year two under Eddie George. However, the Tigers open at Eastern Washington (10-3 LY) and then face Jackson St before traveling to Middle Tennessee. TSU then faces D-II Lane and Bethune-Cookman. TSU does get UT Martin, SEMO and EIU at home, and faces Tenn Tech & Murray St on the road in OVC play. TSU then faces Texas A&M-Commerce in the season finale. The schedule lightens up for TSU after the F/3 games and if they can get on a role and stay healthy the Tigers could find themselves in contention in the OVC.