

CHARLESTON SOUTHERN 2021 PREVIEW

Notre Dame's all-timer leading rusher Autry Denson became HC at Charleston Southern ahead of the '19 season. CSU football has only been around since '91, and quickly jumped to FCS in '93. CSU did not post their first winning season until '05. They began to take the next step under current Coastal Carolina HC Jamey Chadwell, starting with a 10-win season in '13 and Big South conference titles in '15 and '16. Chadwell moved on from CSU after the '16 season, and former HC Mark Tucker went 11-11 in two seasons following by far the greatest run in CSU's short history. Autry Denson was brought in after serving as Notre Dame's RB coach the previous four years.

CSU started 0-4 to begin Denson's tenure but finished 6-6 after winning six of their final eight games, including the final four in a row. In spring, CSU lost a tough game to start their season (24-19 at #9 Kennesaw St) and dropped their next game in addition, but again rallied to win their final two games to finish .500 for a second-straight year.

CSU averaged 363 ypg of total offense in '21 while putting up 22 ppg. In spring, the offense dipped to 348 ypg while putting up 21 ppg. Sr. Jack Chambers has been the starting QB since '19 and had an impressive spring as CSU averaged 251 ypg through the air with Chambers sporting a 7/4 TD/INT ratio. Chambers was also the team's leading rusher in spring (192/3.0). CSU will look to replace their starting running back from this past spring but after he averaged just over two yards per carry (2.2), that shouldn't be difficult. CSU averaged just 97 ypg on the ground in spring (2.7). CSU returns its top two WRs from spring including Jr. Cayden Jordan (274/18.3). They also return '19s leader WR, Gr. Garriss Schwarting (575/14.7). Schwarting had an off '20-'21 last spring but provides QB Chambers with a skilled and experienced WR corps. CSU returns four full-time starters and five total from their OL this past spring, and the run game ought to improve.

The defense in '19 allowed 30 ppg on 411 ypg. Last spring, CSU allowed 20 ppg on just 336 ypg. The biggest difference being that CSU went from allowing 224 ppg on the ground (5.5) to giving up only 132 ypg rushing (3.1). It all starts with the emergence of Sr. DL Shaundre Mims, who was named to the Big South 1st Team after averaging 1.4 TFL per game. The defense returns 11 starters on defense, with seven of them being considered full-time starters from a season ago. While Mims will be a force upfront, the backend is secured by the team's leading tackler last spring, Jr. Cody Cline. Cline made 40 stops with 1.0 TFL, a PBU, and two INTS in four games last season and was named the Top Returning Big South Defensive Back by HERO Sports.

Sr. Nathaniel Toole converted just 2/4 FGAs, but did bang home a 53 yd FG vs Robert Morris. Both of Toole's missed FGAs were blocked. Toole is also the team's KOS and averaged 51.7 yards per kickoff. Gr. Miller Braddock is a solid P to have in the fold (40.1). GSU does have to replace their PR but return their starting KR in So. Ja'Rell Smith.

CSU will have to improve offensively if it wants to make a run at a conference title this year. While the defense will keep CSU in a fair number of games, there is too much responsibility being heaped upon QB Jack Chambers. The sack rate from '19 nearly doubled to 10.6% last spring. Chambers was forced out of the pocket more than he would have liked, being sacked at least three times each game, but still managed to complete 63.3% of his passes. If CSU can better protect the QB, and establish any sort of run game, then they can compete. They start off the season by hosting the favorite to win the conference, Monmouth, followed by a trip to East Carolina. CSU should be able to handle the schedule as it loosens up a bit during the middle of the season. After years of hovering around .500, CSU should concentrate on putting together a winning season and set their sights on competing for a conference championship in '22.