

KENNESAW STATE 2021 PREVIEW

Kennesaw State is a top-flight program after just six seasons of existence. KSU won back-to-back Big South titles in '16 and '17 and already have as many FCS playoff wins as any team in Big South history. KSU won a playoff game three straight years (4-3 from '17-'19) and recorded double-digit win seasons in each of their last three full seasons. KSU has been ranked inside the top 25 for 45 consecutive weeks, a Big South record.

KSU was earmarked for a fourth consecutive trip to the FCS playoffs after starting out last spring 4-0. However, #7 KSU dropped their final regular-season game at #20 Monmouth by a score of 42-17 in what could be viewed as the Big South Conference Championship Game. With the field trimmed from 24 to 16 teams, and KSU being soundly defeated by their conference's representative, KSU was left out of the FCS playoff. This is KSU's final year competing in the Big South as an associate member before joining their primary conference and it's new football league, the ASUN, for the '22 season.

HC Brian Bohannon (only HC in program history) had one goal in mind last spring, and that was to run the ball down opponents' throats. KSU averaged 268 ypg on the ground last spring, which was second in the nation. While KSU has always been a run-first and run-often team under Bohannon, their unfamiliarity with pass blocking came to a head vs Monmouth. While attempting 18 passes in their season finale, KSU was sacked six times, rising their sack rate allowed to a staggering 22.2% for the season. Jr. QB Jonathan Murphy threw just 24 passes all season, completing 13 of them for 275 yds with three TDs and one INT. KSU had six players attempt at least 22 rushes, and had three players with at least 48 rush attempts in just five games. Gr. RB Kyle Glover was the team's leading rusher in '20-'21 (278/5.2) while Sr. Isaac Foster was second (229/7.6) and both will be back this fall (Foster was a Preseason All-Big South Honorable Mention). While the team doesn't throw the ball often, KSU had led the nation the last two seasons in passing yds per completion. Jr. Will Haigler, last year's leading receiver (116/23.2), returns this fall. The offense returns nine starters, with the RG and RT needing replaced. The OL does feature Preseason All-Big South 1st Team honoree, Gr. Jake Lassiter. KSU perhaps will look to find a more balanced RT to help in pass protection when KSU decides to take a deep shot or is forced to drop back more than usual.

KSU had two defensive TDs last spring, which ranked fourth nationally. On top of their opportunistic abilities, KSU had a straight-up good defense last year. In fact, they held opponents to 3.5 ypc (114) and under 175 ypg through the air (168). KSU recorded multiple sacks in three of their five games and held opposing QBs to 160 yds passing or less in three of their five games, including an effort against conference foe Robert Morris where they allowed just 51 yds passing on 19 attempts (2.7). KSU losses it's top two tacklers from last spring, both LBs, so HC Brian Bohannon will have to pinpoint who his emotional leaders will be defensively. With that said, KSU returns eight starters and 12 of their top 15 tacklers from last spring. The top six DL are all back, and four of the top five DBs are set to return as well. It may very well be a next-man-up mentality for Bohannon, as he returns his next two LBs with the departure of his top two.

Sr. Isaac Foster isn't just a productive change of pace RB, but the best RS in the Big South. Foster averaged 110 all-purpose ypg thanks to his 23.1 average per kickoff return, while collecting 4.6 yds per punt return. Foster is the Preseason All-Big South 1st Team selection at bot KR and PR. Sr. PK Nathan Robertson was 5/7 on FGAs last spring, with both his misses from 40 or more yds. Robertson registered a long of 44 and was also Preseason All-Big South 1st Team. KSU will have to find a replacement for their P who also doubled as the KOS in '20-'21, and the only P on KSU's roster is Fr. Ben Moran.

It is easy to understand why KSU was picked to finish second in the Big South, as they return 17 out of a possible 22 starters between the offense and defense, coupled with their excellent special teams. While flipping the field is always crucial, HC Brian Bohannon has the run game and stout defense to at least at times cover for a suspect punting game if indeed that ends up being the case. It's also easy to understand why KSU had only one player from offense or defense receive Preseason All-Big South honors, and they are a very tough and old-school team that admittedly lacks star power. KSU wins as a team, and they win often, which is most important. Kennesaw State gets Monmouth at home this year in another season finale showdown that will likely determine who comes out on top as Big South champs in '21, although KSU must look out for Big South newcomer North Carolina A&T to avoid any slips up, who they also get at home in mid-November.