

# DELAWARE STATE 2021 PREVIEW

Delaware State have recently made a habit out of being cellar-dwellers in the MEAC. Former HC Kermit Blount ('11-'14) was 16-29 in four seasons but went 2-10 in his final season. Former HC Kenny Carter ('15-'17) took over and was a woeful 3-30 in three seasons, including going 0-19 on the road. In stepped former DSU standout Rod Milstead, who had spent a year under Blount in '14 as the OL coach. Milstead was a three-time ALL-MEAC selection at OG and an FCS All-American in '91 for DSU. Milstead played eight seasons in the NFL and was a starting LG for the San Francisco 49ers. Milstead won three MEAC championships as a player and won a Super Bowl with the 49ers, knowing what it takes to win at the highest of levels. However, Milstead is just 7-21 after his first three seasons as HC. In his first season in '18, the team won at least three games for the first time since '13. Regardless, DSU had a -9 TO margin, was outgained by 42 ypg, and went 0-7 on the road. While the TO margin improved to -5 in '19, DSU outgained by 69 ypg and went winless on the road for a fifth straight season (0-5). In a shortened spring '20-'21 season, DSU improved to a -1 TO margin, and despite being outgained by 88 ypg, they went 2-3 (both wins vs Howard) and snapped their 34-game road losing streak (DSU 37 Howard 28).

HC Rod Milstead immediately fixed a completely broken rushing attack in '18. Under HC Kenny Carter in '17, DSU averaged just 68 rush ypg (2.4). DSU also could not protect the QB in '17, allowing an astronomical 13.7% sack rate. Milstead guided DSU to 188 ypg rushing (4.1). DSU was also much better at protecting the QB under Milstead in year one, with the sack rate against DSU dropping to 7.2% in '18. The team averaged 316 ypg in '18, but in '19 DSU was only able to muster 284 ypg of total offense. The biggest reason being the rushing attack was not as effective. With DSU having to replace their top rusher from '18, they dropped to 141 rush ypg (3.9). Another reason could be DSU's inability to stabilize the QB position. DSU's leading passer in '18 threw the ball for a staggering 702 yds, thus began the ushering in of 6'5", true freshman QB Tylik Bethea for '19. Passing ypg improved from 128 ypg in '18 to 143 ypg in '19, but true freshman Bethea left lots of room for improvement with his 10/11 TD/INT ratio and 46.5% completion percentage, despite DSU returning two of its top three WRs from '18. Bethea only started one game in the shortened spring '20-'21 season, throwing nine passes before going down with injury. This may have been a positive though, as DSU was able to garner experience for So. backup QB Jared Lewis moving forward in case Bethea goes down again in '21. Bethea has his top three WRs returning from his true freshman season in '19, and this will give him as good a chance as possible to make the necessary strides in year two. Although DSU is losing two of its top three rushers from '19, they return their leading rusher from '19, So. Thomas Bertrand-Hudon. Bertrand-Hudon had an impressive rFr. year, as he was sixth in the MEAC with 56.6 ypg rushing (508/4.6). True freshman Sy'veon Wilkerson was mixed in during the shortened spring '20-'21 season, leading DSU with 65.5 rush ypg (262/5.0). Bertrand-Hudon is 6'0", 220 lbs. while Wilkerson is 5'8", 205 lbs. This duo could be the "thunder-and-lightening" DSU needs to help resurrect their rushing attack. So. WR Bizzet Woodley led the team with 413 receiving yds (15.3) despite only starting in six games as a true freshman. At 6'5" and 225 lbs., Bizzet has the size and ability to be a real playmaker on the outside. The ability of Bethea and Woodley to develop and maintain chemistry will show how high the ceiling for this offense truly is. The OL struggled in spring as it looked to replace four full-time starters, only returning Sr. LG. Matthew Derks from the '19 season. The growing pains for the OL were obvious, as they allowed multiple sacks in every game and ended the shortened '20-'21 with a horrifying 17.2% sack rate against them. Sr. RT James King is the only other OL with starting experience dating back to '19 (1 start), and whatever upside this offense potentially has could be up in smoke if the OL doesn't grow exponentially from the experience they gained from the five games they played in during their shortened '20-'21 slate.

HC Rod Milstead took over a defense that was wholly-ineffective in '17, allowing 435 ypg while giving up 38 ppg. Like his offense, Milstead's defense saw an immediate turnaround in '18. DSU gave up 34 ppg in '18 but cut down to 358 ypg. The biggest difference was the pass defense, which gave up 272 ypg through the air in '17 but allowed just 186 ypg in '18. The defense was similar in '19, allowing 353 ypg of total offense, but for a second straight season cut ppg allowed (31). In '20-'21, DSU put out its best defense under Milstead, allowing 348 ypg and 24 ppg. The DL has Milstead's fingerprints all over it, posting a similar sack rate of 3.9% in '18 as Kenny Carter's DL posted in '17, but a 4.2% sack rate in '19 gave way to the 7.7% that Milstead produced this past spring. Jr. Corey St. John made two starts along the DL in '19, but St. John aside, this was an entirely new DL in '20-'21. The LBs return DSU's top tackler from '19, Jr. Brooks Parker (52/9.5). Parker leads an incredibly experienced unit, which returns four of their top five tacklers from the full '19 season. The group gained even more experience last spring, with three returning starters from '19 making every start at LB in spring '20-'21. LBs may be the strength of the entire team given the amount of experience they have coming back for '21. The DBs will have their work cut out for them in '21, as they lose their top two DBs from '19 and are relying on converted Jr. WR Charles Peeler to sure up the backend. Peeler made his transition in the middle of the '19 season, starting the first four games at WR before starting four games at DB. Peeler got more starts this past spring, and his progression will be a big key for DSU's secondary that loses four full-time starters from '19. The DBs do return three of their top five tacklers from '19 and held opponents to 51.7% passing in '20-'21.

So. Jake Bridal enters his third season as the KOS but has just as many kicks OB as he does TB (four). Jr. PK/P Jose Romo-Martinez is 22/31 on career FGAs and has pinned the opponent 120 twenty times on 70 punts since the start of '19. DSU returns Fr. Wade Inge, who struggled on offense in '20-'21 but was a productive addition to the kick return unit (21.1). Jr. Charles Peeler mixed in at PR in '19 before assuming the role full-time in '20-'21 (8.0).

As with MEAC foes S.C. State and Morgan St, DSU has huge question marks at the QB position. It's very possible this is a make-or-break year for HC Rod Milstead, who enters year four with the previous two HCs at DSU not having their contracts renewed after four and three seasons, respectively. DSU remains just 2-38 on the road since the start of '14, while 1-13 in away games under Milstead. Milstead's cache as a DSU great and Super Bowl winning player may grant him additional time regardless of this season's results, but he must improve upon the momentum of '20-'21 if DSU plans to continue to build toward producing its first winning team in nearly a decade. Two wins over Howard this past spring were encouraging, and if DSU can beat Howard once more this fall, a win over Morgan St. this season could finally push DSU towards the middle of the MEAC standings in '21.