

Austin Peay 2021 Preview

Going into 2020, Austin Peay was off their first 11-win season in program history & their first OVC championship in 42 years. In that magical season of 2019 the Governors made it to the third round of the FCS playoffs, as they defeated #16 Furman and #3 Sacramento St before ultimately losing at #5 Montana St. All of this success was under 1st-year HC Mark Hudspeth, but in the offseason Hudspeth would resign as the head coach. Marquase Lovings was the interim HC for the 3-game fall schedule before Austin Peay named Scotty Walden the new HC. Prior to taking over here, Walden was the interim HC at Southern Miss in the fall of 2020 & is the youngest FBS/FCS HC coming into the 2021 season at just 31 years old. After winning the Sgt. York Trophy for the first time in 2017 they retained the trophy in '18 and '19 but went 1-2 in the Sgt. York games LY and did not retain the trophy.

Austin Peay went with a 2 QB system in 2017, and saw their offense put up the best numbers of the decade (387 ypg, 27 ppg). The Governors went with that same 2 QB system in '18 and their offensive numbers jumped up 419 ypg and 31 ppg. Dual-threat QB JaVaughn Craig threw for 3,208 yds (58%, 28-13) and ran for 714 (5.3, 9 td) in '19 and led the Governors offense to 419 ypg again and they averaged 35 ppg. Austin Peay went 0-3 in the fall of 2020 including a 55-0 loss at Pitt and a 55-20 loss at Cincinnati. After losing the 1st game of the spring season to OVC foe Tennessee Tech the Governors won 4 of their final 5 games including an upset at #7 Jacksonville St 13-10 where the Governors were outgained 259-238 but were +5 in TO's.

The QB for the fall portion of the schedule was Jeremiah Oatsvall & he hit just 49% for 479 yds (0-3 ratio). True frosh Draylen Ellis took over at QB in the spring and for the season he threw for 1,270 yds (52%, 14-4) but only ran for 84 yds. Coming into this season Ellis was named preseason OVC offensive POY! RB Brian Snead led the team in rushing (522, 5.5, 4 td) but CJ Evans (365, 5.4, 4 td) and Ahmaad Tanner (283, 5.1, 3 td) also were solid contributors in the run game. The top WR in 2020 was DeAngelo Wilson (619, 14.1, 3 td, 1st Tm OVC) who was the OVC offensive POY! Overall, there were 4 WR's overall that topped 20 catches and 200 yds including Baniko Harley (28, 387, 5 td) and Eugene Minter (21, 253, 4 td). The Austin Peay OL gave up 16 sacks last season but 12 of them came in the first 5 games. This season the Governors offense returns 9 starters with the top losses being WR Wilson (6 sts, 1st Tm OVC) and 2nd Tm OVC OL Robert Holmes. They do bring back three All-OVC OL in Bucky Williams, Colby McKee, and Seth Johnson & add Joe Ware who started 4 gms LY at Bowling Green. With the majority of this unit still intact for 2021, they should top the 343 ypg and 24 ppg they put up last season.

In 2017 Austin Peay allowed 311 ypg and 25 ppg, which was their best marks of the decade. With 7 starters back in '18, those numbers surprisingly jumped up to 384 ypg and 31 ppg allowed. The defense in '19 only allowed over 350 yds in 3 out of their 15 games and for the season they allowed just 308 ypg and 21 ppg. In the fall portion of the Governors schedule they allowed 468 ypg and 45 ppg, granted they did play 2 FBS teams on the road. In the OVC portion of the schedule they improved to allowing 300 ypg and 28 ppg. This unit was led by 1st Tm OVC LB Jack McDonald (8 st, 70 tkl, 9 tfl, 3 pbu, 1 int) and 1st Tm OVC NB Kordell Jackson (8 st, 54 tkl, 9.5 tfl, 5 pbu). This side of the ball does suffer more losses than the offense as 5 starters depart including FS Terrell Vassel (8 st, 43 tkl, 3.5 tfl) and DE Matthew Gayle (7 st, 37 tkl, 3 sk). The DLine is hit the hardest as they lose 4 of their top 6 tacklers but they do add PS#88 Penn St transfer Damion Barber. The top 2 LB's return and 3 of the top 4 DB's return including Koby Perry (2 st, 36 tkl, 3 tfl) and Jonathan Edwards (7 st, 29 tkl, 6 pbu).

Kicker Grant Paulette hit 5-6 FG's LY, but is not on the current roster as of 7/20. Mississippi St transfer Cole Deeds is in line to be the next FG kicker. (0-3 on FG's LY). Former Middle Tenn P Matt Rigney avg'd 36.1 yds per punt & the team net was just 30.3. WR Jay Parker led the team with 204 KR yds and the Governors had just 40 PR yds all season.

Austin Peay's offense should get back to the 2018-19 form with QB Ellis leading the way and a pair of solid RB's running behind an experienced OL. The defense does get 6 starters back, but does lose some talent up front. LB's McDonald and Henderson will be the leaders in the middle & NB Jackson will be a stud in the back end. With the conference movements the Governors do play Tennessee St twice and face ECU as a non-conference game. We expect Austin Peay to be in contention for their 2nd OVC crown in 3 seasons as they no longer have to contend with Jacksonville St.