

Murray St 2021 Preview

In 2018 Murray State was off a 5-6 season where they did go 5-3 in OVC play. MSU did return 14 st's in 2019 and the Racers opened '19 with a 4-3 record (2 losses to Georgia & Toledo) and began OVC play with a 2-1 record before dropping their last 5 OVC games and finished with a 4-8 record overall and a 2-6 conference record. Murray St opted to make a change at coach going into the 2020 season & they hired Dean Hood. From 2008-15 Hood was the HC at Eastern Kentucky and went 55-38 (44-19 in OVC) including 3 trips to the playoffs, so he is familiar with the teams in this conference. Though the season was delayed until the spring, Hood led Murray St to their first winning season since 2011 & their best OVC record since 2005. The Racers opened up 5-0 which tied the best start in team history, but dropped their final 2 games including a 28-14 loss to OVC champion Jacksonville St.

In 2017 the Racers put up just 294 ypg including twice not breaking 100 total yards in a game! In '18 MSU returned 8 starters and they gained 140 more ypg (404) and scored a TD more per game (28 ppg)! The Racers had to replace their QB in '19 but still managed to put up 379 ypg, but scored just 23 ppg. Last season Preston Rice returned at QB (12 st, 2932, 64%, 20-13 in '19) and he threw for 1,294 yds (9-5 ratio) and was named 2nd Tm OVC but his accuracy went down as he only hit 52.5% of his throws. Rice does have dual-threat ability (366 rush in '19) and ran for 225 yds (3.8, 6 td) last season. However the Murray St offense only put up 327 ypg in 2020. Damonta Weatherspoon (499, 4.7, 5 td, 2nd Tm OVC) along with Rodney Castille (143, 2.5) were the top 2 RB's in 2020. With QB Rice along with Weatherspoon back, this gives MSU an experienced backfield coming into this season.

Back in '19 Murray St averaged 259 pass ypg but LY that number dipped to 185 pass ypg. The receivers were led by 1st Tm OVC WR LaMarte Brooks who had 37 rec for 429 yds (11.6) and Jacob Bell was #2 with 21 rec for 305 yds (14.5, 2nd Tm OVC) while DeQuan Dallas finished #3 with 13 rec for 289 yds (22.2) and led with 4 td's. The good news for this unit is that all 3 starters are back and with a year of chemistry with QB Rice under their belts the pass game should show increased production this season. The OLine was solid and steady for the Racers last season as they had the same starting five in 6 of their 7 games. While that unit did pave the way for 142 rush ypg (3.9) they did allow just 5 sks on the season and 3 of them were in the final game. With all 5 starters back along this OLine led by 1st Tm OVC C Levi Nesler and 1st Tm OVC RT Jacob Vance. Aaron Baum hit 7-10 FG's last season (4-5 on FG's 40+ yds) with a long of 58 yds!

In 2017, MSU's defense held teams to under 400 ypg (390) and 30 ppg (29) for the first time since '11. With 5 starters back in '18, MSU's defense took a step back to allowing 456 ypg and 35 ppg. Through the F/5 gms of '19 MSU allowed 500+ yds in 3 gms (2 gms vs FBS foes) but in OVC play they allowed 373 ypg and 26 ppg. Last season MSU held their F/2 foes to 213 yds and 185 yds respectively but then allowed 413 ypg and 27 ppg over their final 5 games. During their 5 game win streak to open the season MSU was outgained in 3 of those games, but were good at forcing TO's as they were +8 TO's through their F/5 gms. The DLine was solid vs the run early on but over their L/3 games the Racers gave up 222 rush ypg (5.2). After recording 9 sks in their F/3 games, MSU picked up just 4 sks in their L/4 games. The DLine was led by DE Ethan Edmonson (7 st, 26 tkl, 2 sk, 3 tfl) along with DT Izaiah Reed (23 tkl, 3 sk). This unit up front returns all 3 st's and we expect better numbers against the run.

The Racers LB corps was strong last season as Eric Samuta (6 st, 64 tkl, 5 tfl) was the #1 tkl'r while Alec Long (7 st, 61 tkl, 1.5 tfl) was the #2 tkl'r and Tay Carothers (7 st, 32 tkl, 2 pbu) was the #3 tkl'r. They all return this season along with Scotty Humpich (7 st, 24 tkl, 4.5 tfl) and this unit should be one of the best LB corps in the OVC. The Racers pass defense held foes LY to 181 pass ypg & held opposing QB's to just 52.6% completions for the year. The MSU defense also had 11 INT's last season in 7 games. The Racers secondary was led by CB Marcis Floyd (5 st, 32 tkl, 6 pbu, 3 int) along with FS Don Parker (7 st, 28 tkl, 2.5 tfl, 1 int) and CB Quinaz Turner (7 st, 23 tkl, 2.5 tfl, 5 pbu). MSU brings back all 4 starters in the back end and overall they return all 11 starters from this defense, which should be one of the better defenses in the conference this season. Louis Halton was the main punter for MSU as he averaged 39.3 yds per punt (L/57, 11 punts I/20) and the Racers as a team had a net of 35.5 yds.

The Racers get Mississippi Valley State for their opener on Thursday Sept. 2nd. MSU's other 2 non-conference games come against Cincinnati and at Bowling Green. While Cincy looks like a top ten team, the game against BGSU could be a winnable game for the Racers. After a bye week MSU opens OVC play with a game vs E.Illinois before traveling to play UT Martin and SE Missouri. MSU follows that up with a home game vs Austin Peay and then travel to Tenn St before hosting Tenn Tech. The Racers close out the season with a second game against SE Missouri and E.Illinois after the OVC saw 2 of their members leave the conference this season. The Racers are the OVC preseason favorites with good reason (return all 22 starters) and as long as they remain healthy they should challenge for the OVC crown.