

SE Missouri 2021 Preview

Southeast Missouri enters year eight of the Tom Matukewicz era. After seven straight losing seasons from 2011-17, the Redhawks have finished at .500 or better the L3Y and the Redhawks won their first-ever playoff game when they came back from a 14-0 deficit to beat Stony Brook 28-14 in '18 and made the playoffs again in '19 after going 9-3 in the regular season. Last season SEMO lost their lone fall game at Southern Illinois 20-17. The Redhawks won their OVC opener in the spring 47-7 at E.Illinois but then lost their next 3 games, though 2 of the losses were by 3 pts to Murray St and 7 pts in 2OT. SEMO did finish the season on a high note by winning their final 3 gms to end OVC play at 4-3.

After averaging 335 yards and 22 points per game from 2015-17, the Redhawk offense took flight in 2018 as SEMO's offense put up 409 ypg (highest total since '14) and 37 ppg, their highest mark of the past decade. In '19 the offense did suffer some losses and they took a step back to putting up 365 ypg and 28 ppg. Coming into '20 the Redhawks lost their QB, and Andrew Bunch took over and was inconsistent at times last season as he threw for 1,370 yds (56.6%) and an 8-9 ratio. The run game was also inconsistent during the season as they had 4 games of at least 145 rush yds including 325 yds at Tennessee St, but they were also held under 90 yds 4 times including rushing for just 73 yds vs Murray St & 24 yds vs Jacksonville St. Geno Hess (L/5 sts) led with 666 (4.9) and 12 td's, while Zion Custis was #2 with 184 (3.7) and they both return for the '21 season.

The receiving corps was led by Zack Smith (8 st, 403, 10.6, 4 td) and Johnny King (7 sts, 392, 12.6, 2 td) and they both return this season along with Aaron Alston (4 sts, 256, 14.2). The lone starter lost is TE Austin Crump (F/6 sts, 71, 8.9). The OLine stayed relatively intact all season (the starting 5 OL each started at least 5 gms) led by 1st Tm OVC LG Jaden Rosenthal (7 sts) and 2nd Tm OVC C Shyron Rodgers (8 sts). Overall the OLine paved the way for 148 rush ypg (3.9) and gave up 13 sks in 8 gms (5.7%). The Redhawks bring back 8 starters on offense overall but will have to replace their starting QB again, and Jacob Buie (6'5" 220 lbs) saw limited reps LY and could be the new starter. They do bring back 4 st's on the OL but lose their LT Ja'Chai Baker (5 sts) as he transfers to S.Alabama. The Redhawks bring back kicker Kenny Doak after he hit 5-9 FG's last season but had a long of just 35 yds.

The Redhawk defense in '17 put up their best marks of the decade as they allowed 346 ypg and 22 ppg. In '18 the SEMO defense allowed 480 ypg (worst mark this decade) and 31 ppg but did lead the FCS with 36 TO's forced and TO margin (+24)! SEMO returned 10 st's on defense in '19 and while they were "only" +3 in TO's they did cut back to allowing 379 ypg! Last season the defense did improve again as they would allow 355 ypg and held teams to 23 ppg. The DLine did allow 260 rush yds in the opener but trimmed that number down to 162 rush ypg vs OVC foes. The DLine does return 2 st's in Bryson Donnell (6 st, 41 tkl, 3 tfl, 1st Tm OVC) and LaWilliam Holmes (5 st, 14 tkl) and they also bring back 2 other players with 5 sts combined. The lone starter lost is Daterraion Richardson (5 st, 13 tkl, 1.5 tfl).

The Redhawks LB corps in 2020 was led by Mike Matthews (8 st, 45 tkl, 2 tfl, 3 pbu) and Brandon Mincey (8 st, 42 tkl, 4 tfl) and they both return this season along with Omardrick Douglas (6 st, 26 tkl, 3.5 tfl). The lone starter gone is Bryant Pirtle (8 st, 36 tkl, 4.5 tfl, 2 sk) but Izeal Terrell was a backup LB in '20 that started 2 gms and had 28 tkl. The secondary last season was led by SS Lawrence Johnson (8 st, 55 tkl, 4 pbu) and FS Bydarrius Knighten (7 st, 40 tkl, 2 pbu). The two starting CB's were Al Young (6 st, 15 tkl, 5 pbu, 2 int) and Shabari Davis (23 tkl, 4 pbu, 2 int). For the season this unit allowed 181 pass ypg and only allowed 48.4% of opponents passes to get completed. This unit returns 2 st's in Johnson and Davis will need 2 new st's to emerge if they are to put up similar numbers to last season. The Redhawks also bring back their punter Zach Hayes who averaged 42.2 yds per punt last season.

Head coach Matukewicz has a plethora of talent to work with in 2021 as 15 starters are back. There is some concern with the QB situation as well as losing 2 st'rs from a talented secondary. The Redhawks must travel to defending FCS national champion Sam Houston St & the next week they are at Mizzou in their non-conference schedule and also face Murray St and UT Martin twice in conference play. If the QB situation can come together and OL stays intact SEMO could be in contention for the OVC title, but they do have to travel to Austin Peay who is also among the favorites for the OVC crown.