

Tennessee St 2021 Preview

After 11 seasons as the HC at Tennessee St, Rod Reed (57-60 record) did not have his contract renewed. Since reaching the FCS Playoffs back in '13, TSU have gone 7 seasons without making it back to the postseason. The 2020 spring season started off with B2B losses at Austin Peay (27-20) and home against Jacksonville St (38-16). TSU picked up their first win of the season when they got a GW FG against EIU on the final play. After a loss at Murray St the Tigers picked up a win against UT Martin where they were up 26-7 in the 4Q before having to hold off a 4Q rally by UTM. The final 2 games of the season for TSU were both DD losses to TennTech & SE Missouri. TSU went just 1-2 in their Sgt. York trophy games and have not won the trophy since '13. However, the TSU program made a big hire when they made former Heisman Trophy Winner and NFL All-Pro RB Eddie George as the next head coach.

TSU's offense dipped to 326 ypg and 24 ppg in 2017, but with 8 starters back on offense those numbers jumped back up to 432 ypg and 29 ppg in 2018. In 2019 the offense still managed to put up 400 ypg but the ppg dipped a bit to 26. During the Tigers spring season last year they struggled to move the ball & the most yds they put up in a game was 367 yds. For the season TSU averaged just 301 ypg and 18 ppg. Isaiah Green was the main starting QB for the Tigers LY and he threw for just 916 yds (58%, 2-2) in 5 starts, while Deveon Bryant started a pair of games and hit just 32% (18-56) for 256 yds and a 2-1 ratio. Bryant did have 190 rush yds on the season as well. The TSU rush attack did show signs of life during the season as they ran for 160+ yds in 3 of their 7 games, but in 3 of their games they were also held to under 100 rush yds. For the season the Tigers ran for 134 ypg (3.6) and they were led by Devon Starling who rushed for 648 yds (5.2). Both QB's who started LY along with RB Starling return this season.

The Tigers only put up 167 pass ypg last season, but were led by Cam Wyche (7 st, 22 rec, 456 yds, 2nd Tm OVC) and Daryon Johnson (5 st, 18 rec, 263 yds) along with TE Josh Trueheart (7 st, 13 rec, 137 yds). Overall 5 players topped 100 yds receiving LY for TSU and they all return, giving the QB's several exp'd targets to throw to this season. The OLine struggled to open holes consistently for the run game, and they also gave up 19 sks on 190 pass attempts (10%). The good news for the Tigers OLine is that they bring back every player who started a game last season, which includes 1st Tm OVC RT Cam Durley. With literally the entire offense returning this season & the offense now being run by former NFL OC and HC Hue Jackson, we expect this unit to be more productive in 2021.

In 2017 the TSU defense allowed just 278 ypg and 20 ppg. In '18 TSU had to deal with injuries and this led to them allowing 430 ypg and 32 ppg in 2018. In '19 TSU's defense took another step back as they allowed 455 ypg and 35 ppg. Last season the defense showed a little improvement as they allowed 387 ypg but only cut the ppg allowed to 31. The DLine was led by 1st Team OVC DT Davoan Hawkins (7 st, 32 tkl, 5 sk, 4 tfl) but the Tigers run defense gave up 194 ypg (5.1) including 325 (7.6) to Jacksonville St and 250 (6.1) to Austin Peay. They also collected 16 sks in 7 gms including 5 against EIU. Along with Hawkins this unit returns DE Justin Brown (6 st, 17 tkl, 4 tfl), Terray Jones (6 st, 8 tkl) and DE Chris Walker (2 st, 14 tkl, 7 tfl). Every DLine player that started a game LY for TSU is returning and this unit should show improvement against the run.

The LB unit last season was led by Nyle Love (3 st, 41 tkl) and James Green (7 st, 28 tkl, 5 tfl, 3 pbu, 2nd Tm OVC) along with Terry Straughter (3 st, 16 tkl, 2 tfl) and Michael Crawford (1 st, 13 tkl, 4.5 tfl). The LB corps helped TSU's defense hold foes to 68 ypg less than they gave up in '19. FS Josh Green (7 st, 39 tkl, 4 pbu, 3 int, 2nd Tm OVC) and CB Nick Harper (7 st, 32 tkl, 6 pbu) helped lead the TSU pass defense allow 193 pass ypg & held opposing QB's to 56% completions for the season. Along with Harper, CB Fondren Hollis (7 st, 26 tkl, 2 pbu) formed a solid duo while S Kenyon Garlington (4 st, 15 tkl, 2.5 tfl, 3 pbu) was also a solid player in the back end. The Tigers defense overall returns every player that started a game LY and there is no question they should show improvement on that side of the ball this season. Punter Kaleb Mosley (2nd Tm OVC) is back as well after averaging 40.1 yds per punt last season and punting 11 balls inside the 20, but also had 2 punts blocked.

This season the Tigers open on Sept. 5th in Canton, Ohio in the Black College Football Hall of Fame Classic against Grambling. The following week TSU travels to Memphis to face Jackson St in the Southern Heritage Classic. They open OVC play with road games against SE Missouri and Austin Peay, who are both projected to compete for the OVC crown. Due to the conference realignment TSU does have to face Austin Peay twice and they also face Mississippi St to close out the season. The Tigers have practically all their talent returning and have a big-name ex-player as their new HC and an exp'd NFL HC/OC as the offensive coordinator. If this team can win those early OVC road games, they will find themselves in the hunt for the OVC crown in 2021.