

UT Martin 2021 Preview

Jason Simpson enters his 16th season as the HC of the UT Martin Skyhawks. Simpson is 90-77 during his tenure here and has won at least 6 games in 10 seasons. UT Martin made the FCS Playoffs in his first season here back in 2006, but have not been back since. In 2019 UT Martin brought back just 10 starters and opened the season 1-2 but would win 5 of their first 6 OVC games including an upset win vs Jacksonville St at home. For the season UTM would go 7-5 but finished 6-2 on OVC play behind SE Missouri and Austin Peay, who were their only 2 OVC losses. UT Martin played no games in the fall of 2020 but did play 7 OVC games in the spring. The Skyhawks finished the spring with a 3-4 record and this included a win over Austin Peay on the road and 3 losses by 5 pts or less. UT Martin did go 2-1 trophy in their Sgt. York Trophy games but lost the tiebreaker to Tennessee Tech.

UTM's offense took a step back in '17 as they averaged 298 ypg and 20 ppg. In '18 the offensive numbers jumped up to 408 ypg and 26 ppg. In '19 those numbers would take a dip back down to 332 ypg and again averaged 26 ppg. UTM's offense was a work in progress for much of the season as they put up just 308 ypg over the first 5 games before putting up 370 yds and 436 yds in their final 2 games. UTM's pass attack was their offensive strength as they threw for 260 ppg while the rush offense was stuck in the mud all season as the Skyhawks ran for just 76 (2.6) ypg. The OLine stayed relatively healthy and gave up 16 sks in 7 gms but 11 of those came in 3 games.

The Skyhawks offense loses QB John Bachus, who threw for 1,697 yds (59%) with a 14-7 ratio last season in 7 starts. UTM brings back Dresser Winn at QB but he suffered a season ending ankle injury against Austin Peay in the spring. Winn started the F/7 games of the 2018 season (1601, 66%, 12-9) before going OFY with an injury. Another option may be Stewart Howell, who was 7-9 passing in limited action LY. At RB the Skyhawks return their top 2 players in Peyton Logan (7 st, 340, 4.0) and Zak Wallace (1 st, 113, 2.9). Arguably the biggest strength of the Skyhawks offense coming into this season will be the depth they have at receiver. Last season UTM was led by Colton Dowell (7 st, 40 rec, 459 yds, 4 td, 1st Tm OVC) and Donnell Williams (6 st, 29 rec, 445 yds, 3 td, 2nd Tm OVC). Overall the top 4 receivers and 5 of the top 7 return at receiver for UT Martin including 2nd Tm OVC TE Rodney Williams (30 rec, 327 yds, 4 td). The OLine also comes back strong as every player who started a game last season returns including 2nd Team OVC C Matthan Hatchie. There is an obvious question mark at QB for the Skyhawks, but if Winn can come back healthy or Howell can step up and perform well, this offense is in pretty good shape for the fall 2021 season. Tyler Larco hit 10-12 FG's last season (L/47), was 1st Tm OVC and returns for this season.

In 2017 the Skyhawks allowed just 274 ypg and 14 ppg for the the season. After returning 5 st'rs in 2018 the defense did take a step back as they allowed 363 ypg and 34 ppg! In 2019 UTM again saw an increase in the ypg allowed (384) but the ppg allowed dropped by nearly 10 pts (25 ppg allowed). Last season's defense gave up under 340 yds in 5 of their 7 games (438 all'd vs Austin Peay & 427 all'd vs Jacksonville St) including giving up just 262 ypg over their final 3 games. The run defense for UTM gave up 130 ypg (3.5) including holding 3 foes to 85 yds or less but they did allow over 200 yds to both Jacksonville St & Tenn St. The DLine unit loses their top tackler in DT Kameron Bowdry (7 st, 32 tkl, 4.5 tfl) but they return DE David DuBose (7 st, 18 tkl, 3.5 tfl), as well as NT Korbin Harmon (4 st, 20 tkl, 5 tfl) and Austin Pickett (3 st, 12 tkl, 1.5 tfl). Assuming one of Harmon or Pickett fill the spot of Bowdry this should be a solid DLine.

The Skyhawks got good play from their starting LB's as John Ford (7 st, 43 tkl, 3 tfl, 2 int) and D'Carrious Stephens (7 st, 29 tkl, 6 tfl) while Chris Hunter (23 tkl, 5 tfl) was a solid backup. Jamarius Landers played the JACK position and started 4 gms with 10 tkl & 2.5 tfl. The good news for the

Skyhawks is that all 4 of these players return and along with the return of Tevin Shipp (13 tkl) the UTM LB corps has the top 5 tkl'rs back for this season. UTM's pass defense had only 1 rough outing (305 yds all'd to Austin Peay) but overall the Skyhawks secondary allowed 201 pass ypg and held opposing QB's to just 51.7% completions. Safeties Deven Sims (7 st, 60 tkl, 4 pbu, 1st Tm OVC), JaQuez Akins (6 st, 38 tkl, 3 tfl, 4 pbu, 2nd Tm OVC) and Takeem Young (7 st, 3.5 tfl, 6 pbu, 2 int) were the unit's top 3 tkl'rs. UTM also have talented CB's in Jay Woods (7 st, 23 tkl, 9 pbu, 1st Tm OVC) and Chrishun Jackson (5 st, 19 tkl, 2 pbu). This unit brings back 4 of the 5 st'rs as their lone loss is Jackson, however Oshae Baker started the L/2 gms for UTM at CB in place of Jackson. With nearly the entire core of this strong secondary returning, the Skyhawks should have another stout pass defense. QB Winn was also the P last season (904, 41.1 avg, L/67) before his injury. FG kicker Larco took over as the P and averaged 41.8 yds per punt and overall UTM averaged a 37.2 net.

After opening at WKU on a Thursday the Skyhawks host Samford (4-3 LY with 2 wins over ranked teams) before travelling to Northwestern St (1-5 LY) and Jacksonville St (10-3 LY) who used to be in the OVC but now is moving to the Atlantic Sun. Four of UTM's first 5 OVC games are at home and 3 of those are against OVC favorites Murray St, Austin Peay and SE Missouri. UTM closes out the season with 2 straight road games incl a second game against SE Missouri, but this one is a road game. The uncertainty at QB is part of the reason why we aren't as high on them as other schools, but the Skyhawks still have plenty of talent throughout the team with 18 returning starters and should remain competitive against the OVC's best this season.