

EAST TENNESSEE STATE BUCCANEERS

Randy Sanders enters his 4th season with the ETSU Bucs and was part of National Title staffs at Tennessee and Florida St. ETSU was in the Southern Conference but then ceased football and was dormant from the end of the 2003 season until being reinstated for the 2015 season. They played all their home games at Kermit Tipton Stadium the first two years but opened the new William B Greene Jr Stadium in 2017. They were an Independent in 2015 going 2-9 that first year and -335 ypg vs SoCon foes. They were back in the SoCon in 2016 and went a respectable 5-6 and -150 ypg. They were 4-7 and -95 ypg in 2017. In Sanders first year they made GREAT strides going 8-2 before dropping a game vs Samford but still made the playoffs. They lost in the first round to Jacksonville St 34-27 despite a 436-421 yard edge. Surprisingly they fell to just 2-10 in 2019 going winless in the SoCon but were just -63 ypg. This spring they went 4-2 and were TRI-Champs in the SoCon and +30 ypg. All their games were close with wins by 7, 7, 7 and 4 and losses by 4 & 8. The shared title was their first since 1969 when they were in the OVC. They did defeat VMI the team that took the title and made the playoff.

The offense returns all 11 starters including long time RB Quay Holmes who rushed for 928 (4.5) in 2018, 1143 (5.5) in '19 and 640 (5.2) in just 6 games this past spring! Jacob Saylor has formed a solid tandem with him as he has rushed for 615 (7.2), 653, 5.8) and 257 (6.1) the last 3 years and both return. They had to replace their QB last year and Tyler Riddell started the first 3 games and threw for 575 (61%, 3-2) then Brock Landis started the last 3 throwing for 436 (50%, 2-2). Both return making the unit much more experienced and true frosh Cade Larkins is off injury and will also compete. He is 2nd all time in HS passing in the state of Tennessee. ETSU has a pair of solid TE's in Nate Adkins and Noah West who combined for 18 receptions last year and both are complete TE's that are solid blockers and receivers. Atkins (1st tm Pres SoCon) had 25 receptions in 2019 but missed the first two games last year with injury. Last year they had to replace their top 2 WR's but they had just 342 (14.9) and 317 (10.6) in 12 games in 2019. Will Huzzie (#3 '19, 317 , 10.6) was the top guy with 334 (12.4) while Juliun Lane-Price had 11-161 in the first two games but was banged up and was #2 with 224 (16.0). Isiah Wilson is a name to watch here as he had 5 receptions in the opener but was also injured and had just 3 more all year. The receiving corps is not an overwhelming group but is more experienced and should stay healthier and has a lot of upside. The offense line paved the way for 149 ypg rush (4.1) and allowed just 6.6% sacks. All 5 starters return up front with Tre'mond Shorts garnering 1st team SoCon preseason honors and Tavon Matthews on the 2nd team. The offense was not overwhelming last year but has the leagues best set of RB's and is much more experienced at QB and WR.

The Defense was solid in Sanders first year allowing 353 ypg and just 3.7 ypc rush. The rush D collapsed in 2019 as they gave up 221 ypg and 5.4 ypc on the ground and 383 ypg overall. An emphasis was made to stop the run last year and ETSU actually led the SoCon in rush defense allowing just 115 ypg (3.0) but did allow 67.4% completions. They also led the SoCon in scoring defense allowing just 18.8 ppg while being 2nd in total defense at 287.8 ypg and pass defense at 173.3 ypg. This year all 11 starters are back and LB Jared Folks is back for an amazing EIGHTH YEAR OF COLLEGE FOOTBALL!! The top TWENTY FOUR tacklers are all back. On the First team preseason All SoCon defense is LB Jared Folks and DB Tyree Robinson. Folks is the defending SoCon defensive player of the year after leading the team with 50 tackles last year. Robinson led the SoCon with 6 int's in '18 and had 37 tkl and 4.5 tfl last year. ETSU has two defenders on the 2nd team preseason SoCon in LB Donovan Manuel (#3 tklr, 3.5 sk) and DB Alijah Huzzie (#4 tklr, 3 int, 8 pbu). Other players of note on D are DB Mike Price who was an App State transfer that was #2 tackler in the spring, LB Black Bockrath (15 tkls just 4 gms) and DB Karon Delince (19 tkl, 4 pbu) who is also a Track and Field athlete here. Naturally the Bucs will contend for the Top Defense in the SoCon.

K Tyler Keltner hit 7-10 FG in the spring with a long of 54! Naturally he was 1st team preseason SoCon. P Garrett Taylor had a 40.4 avg (4th in SoCon) and 38.4 net and returns. Star RB Quay Holmes was the top KR (24.) and Alijah Huzzie was the top PR (13.8). Everyone is back so this figures to be one of the strongest special teams units in the SoCon.

ETSU was picked fourth by the coaches with one first place vote. They were picked tied for 3rd in the preseason poll by the media drawing 3 first place votes. QB play will be the key this year as they have arguably the best run game and defense combo of any team in the league. I agree with the polls and with all 22 starters plus both specialists back they are a legitimate contender for the league title.