

# FURMAN PALADINS

Clay Hendrix enters his 5<sup>th</sup> season as head. First of all he did a remarkable job in his first year as Furman had 3 straight losing seasons prior to him taking over and just 10-24 in those 3 years. Hendrix lost his first 3 games but they won the next 7 before a close loss to Samford. That was still good enough to make the playoffs and they knocked off Elon in the opener 28-27. SoCon rival Wofford knocked them out the playoffs the next week 28-10. They opened up 2018 0-3 with losses to Elon, and Clemson but then went 6-1 down the stretch. After being +72 ypg in SoCon play in 2017 they were dead even in yards (0) in 2018 and at 6-4 missed the playoffs. In 2019 Furman only lost to Georgia St by 6 and Virginia Tech by 7 starting out 1-2. They went 7-2 over the last 9 games and were a super impressive +93 ypg in SoCon play making the playoffs for a 2<sup>nd</sup> time in 3 years. They were surprisingly bounced from the playoffs in a 42-6 loss to Austin Peay. This past spring they opened the season without 3 of their star players and then lost 3 during the year. They had very little depth at QB and limited the QB runs. After a strong 3-1 start with only a 1 point loss to VMI (had 358-268 yd edge) they lost their last 3 games for Hendrix's first losing season.

The offense is not the pure triple option but does like to use option and the QB Runs. In 2017 they ran it 631 times (71.7%) and threw it 249. In 2018 it was 490 rushes (75%) to 162 passes. In 2019 it was down to 582 rush att's (70%) with 249 pass att's. Last year with little depth at QB they ran it 179 times (69.6%) the first 3 games with 78 passes and put up 30.6 ppg. Over the last 3 games they had just 98 rush att's (56.6%) and threw it 75 times and the ppg dropped to just 13 ppg! This year with better depth the QB run will return and so should the offense. Overall the offense returns 9 starters. QB Hamp Sisson threw for 638 (60.7%) with a 3-3 ratio in basically playing in just the last 5 games. Last year he threw for 1258 (51.7%, 12-9) and had just 30 yards rushing. They add in Charlotte transfer Colt Minson (DNP there) who Furman had recruited out of high school and he is one of 9 QB's on this years roster. Last year they had to replace their #3 rusher (463, 8.9) and then QB Darren Grainger was #4 rusher in 2019 with 316 (3.4). TB Devin Wynn rushed for 1182 (6.6) in '19 and 511 (4.8) last year. FB Devin Abrams had 615 (6.2) in '19 and 230 (3.8) last year and both return again as do Dominic Roberto (103, 3.7) and Kendall Thomas (81 (6.8). Last year they had to replace their top WR (776, 16.2!). Ryan Deluca was #2 in '19 (288, 15.2) and led with 441 (18.4). TE Ryan Miller was #2 with 254 (16.9) and he led the team with 6 TD's and was 2<sup>nd</sup> Tm SoCon and an FCS All American. Zach Petersen started the first 4 games at WR (inj) and was #3 (125, 17.9). WR Noah Henderson had 65 yds with Charlotte in 2019 and had 7-62 here filling in for Petersen late. D'Juan Bell was 1<sup>st</sup> tm SoCon KR (25.7) in 2018 as a true and last year starting working at WR and had 7-77. They also add in Luke Shiflett from Middle Tenn

St. The Paladins had just 159 (3.5) rush and allowed 9.7% sacks last year and only return 3 starters up front led by 2<sup>nd</sup> Tm preseason SoCon Aderson Tomlin. Nine starters are back this year and I look for closer to 70% runs and a much improved offense provided a running threat develops at QB.

The Defense allowed just 345 ypg in '19 and just 20.5 ppg. Last year they gave up just 323 ypg and 20.4 ppg holding four different foes to under 300 yards despite losing some key players prior to the year. LB Elijah McCoy was the #4 tackler in '19 and missed last year with injury and he is back. 10 of the 11 starters return from the #3 Defense in the SoCon last year with the only loss being CB Darius Kearse (#4 tklr, 3 int). They return 14 of the top 15 tacklers. No players made the 1<sup>st</sup> team preseason SoCon defense and DT Parker Stokes (6.5 tfl, #15 tklr) and DB Travis Blackshear (#8 tklr, 3 pbu). ILB Nick Kuzemka was the #1 tackler and LB Braden Gilby was #2 tackler. DE Adrian Hope had 2 sacks last year. This is a veteran unit with even more talent than last year and will be near the top of the Southern Conference.

Furman has a top notch K/P and he is preseason 2<sup>nd</sup> team SoCon after averaging 43.6 (37.8 net) on punts and hitting 6-7 FG with a long of 47 (2-3 40+). Dejuan Bell did not have his best year averaging just 3.9 on PR's and 15.5 on KR's but should return to form where he was all SoCon as a frosh with 25.7 on KR's. This unit could challenge for the top spot in the conference special teams.

They do have the addition of new Field Turf at Paladin Stadium. Furman was picked 4<sup>th</sup> in the preseason Media poll drawing 1 first place vote and 4<sup>th</sup> by the coaches also drawing one first place vote. They do have one of the best defenses in the league and with the offense getting back to more QB runs and options on offense they should return to form as well. Coach Hendrix is making the playoffs every other year so it is his season and they are a legitimate contender for conference honors.