

HOUSTON BAPTIST HUSKIES

Vic Shealy is just 16-55 in his first 7 years with HBU with zero winning seasons as they went 2-9 (-317 ypg Southland), 2-9 (-251 ypg), 4-7 (-100 ypg), and 1-10 (-189 ypg) in his 4th year. Even with Bailey Zappe throwing for 2808 yards in 2018 they went 1-10 (-91 ypg). In 2019 Zappe threw for 3811 and HBU opened 4-1 but finished 5-7 (-125 ypg) losing 5 of the last 7. Last year they opted to play 4 fall games vs North Texas, Texas Tech, Louis Tech and Eastern Kentucky and went 1-3 but despite facing basically an FBS schedule had their best ypg at -44. Zappe had 35 TD passes last year and two dangerous WR's in Jerreth Sterns and Ben Ratzlaff. HB games averaged 73 ppg in '19. Houston Baptist was better than the final score in the opening 57-31 loss to North Texas. HB had drives of 85/9, 56/11, 67/13 and 42/11 result in a SOD and 3 missed FG's. HB did have a good sized D-line, returned their top 2 tacklers at LB and their top 6 DB's were all 6' or taller but North Texas chewed them up for 721 yards with 360 yds rush and 361 yds pass in the opener. HB trailed 57-17 before going 97/6 and 77/6 for TD's in the 4Q. HBU came up a two-point conversion away from forcing OT vs Texas Tech and red zone opportunities cost them vs North Texas (did trail 57-17). Zappe had a 16-2 ratio in 5 career games vs FBS teams and at LTech HBU led 14-10 early but LT up 38-17 H 52-24 after 3Q. Teams scored 5 straight 4Q TD's as lead went from 28-21-28-21 and finished at 28, 66-38. They finished the year with a 33-30 win at ECU.

The HBU offense is now basically at WKU as the Hilltoppers hired their Offensive coordinator then took in some key transfers from HUB in Bailey Zappe (1833, 66%, 15-1) WR Jerreth Sterns (#1, 454, 9.7), WR Josh Sterns (#2, 403, 31.0), and Ben Ratzlaff (399, 13.8). The 4 freshmen QB's range anywhere from 5'10 Christian Pack to 6'5" Blaise Bentsen who is the most experienced hitting 6-16-82-1-1 in 2019. In 2019 Dreshawn Minniweather rushed for 729 (6.9) while Ean Beek was #2 with 660 (5.0). Last year Beek led with just 137 (3.4) while Minniweather had just 38 (4.2) playing in just 1 game. Those two are both back and should have production much like they had in '19 and be a more focal point of the offense with Minniweather 2nd team preseason Southland. The receiving corps is lightly experienced thanks to the top 2 WR all transferring with the leading returnees being Vernon Harrell (185, 14.2) and DJ Dormeus (131, 13.1). Four of 5 starters return from an offensive line that only allowed 3.2% sacks but had just 88 (3.4) rush. The leader of the unit is 1st team preseason Southland Christian Hood. In Zappe's first year as a starter (2017) he threw for just 548 with a 5-10 ratio and HBU had just 270 ypg and 14 ppg. The last 3 years they have put up 32 ppg and 468 ypg. Despite the experience on the Oline and at RB and coach Shealy's confidence that the offense will still be strong, I think this year's version will more resemble that 2017 version.

The defense allowed 449 ypg in Shealy's first 4 years but 521 ypg the last 3 years with the offense scoring quickly and the D facing more plays. Last year facing 3 potent FBS schools they allowed 592 ypg including 5.6 ypc rush, with just 1 sack and opponents hit

65% of their passes despite a good sized defensive front and secondary. This year they lose their #1 tackler Caleb Johnson, #4 tackler Tim Fluellen and Devion Hargrave (#10 tklr). They return 9 starters on defense including 14 of the top 17 tacklers and with a softer schedule and the offense not scoring as quickly, DB Patrick Wolfe made first team All Southland preseason this year and DL Segun Ijiyera and DL Philip Ossai and LB Brennan Young all made 2nd team All Southland preseason this year. I would expect them to improve to hat 449 ypg level they had in Shealy's first 4 years.

P Blake Patterson had a 40.1 avg and solid 38.2 net. He departs and is replaced by Central Michigan transfer Brady Buell who had 55 punts in 2019 with a 41.9 avg so they are in good shape there. K Gino Garcia has a big leg and while he hit just 5-10 FG's he was 1-3 from 50+ with a long of 50. He hit 18-26 with a long of 54 (2-6 from 50+) in 2019 and is one of the Southlands best. Top PR Jerreth Sterns (121, 7.1) departs. Last year super KR G. Brito (903, 28.2) had to be replaced and HBU had just 16.3 per KR. This is a solid group and if some returnmen emerge they will be near the top of the Southland.

I can honestly say I WATCHED EVERY Houston Baptist game last season for the first time ever! I was impressed with the offense and their effort on a week-to-week basis despite facing 3 good FBS teams. My gut reaction when I heard that HBU's super QB Bailey Zappe, his top 3 WR's and their offensive coordinator were all headed to Western Kentucky was this team is in trouble. I was watching the Southland Conference media days and coach Shealy is confident they will be a solid team this year. After going thru the team in depth, I come away much like the Southland media did and will be picking HBU at the bottom of the conference.