

Northeastern State Demons

Coach Brad Laird inherited a 4-7 team that was -76 ypg (-64 ypg conf). In his first year he went 4-7 and was -56 ypg but cut it to -30 ypg in Southland play. In 2019 his second team went 4-7 and was -32 ypg and just -15 ypg in conference play. Last year they lost their QB, top two RB and top 2 WR. They lost their first 5 games of the spring but had losses by 7, 3, 8 and 8. They were -24 ypg in Southland play and did beat Incarnate Word in a shootout in the season finale 49-47 to finish 1-5.

The offense put up 398 ypg and 27.6 ppg in Southland play in Laird first 3 years but last year improved to 448 ypg but struggled in the red zone with just 24 ppg. Kaleb Fletcher (374 yd, 2-4) and Zachary Clement (192, 0-1) split the snaps in the first 3 games then Fletcher started vs Lamar but Bryce Rivers came off the bench and reinvigorated the offense throwing for 410 vs eventual National Champ Sam Houston St in an 8 point loss and then for 477 yards in the win over Incarnate Word. There is a QB battle this spring as unfortunately Rivers is gone and the remaining two will battle San Diego St transfer Mark Salazar (0 pass att). RB Scooter Adams transferred in from Kilgore College and was a star of the offense with 681 yards and an impressive 8.0 ypc including a pair of 200 yard games! Aubrey Scott was the only other RB with more than 3 rush attempts (QB's were #3, #4, #5 rushers) and had 215 (5.8). Both return. Three of the top 4 WR's are back including the top two in Javon Antonio (521, 15.8) and Gavin Landry (227. 13.4). Kendrick Pope was #3 in '19 with 372 (13.0) and returns. Top TE Jacob Logan (10 rec) is also back. The O-line paved the way for 5.3 ypc rush and allowed 6.8% sacks. This year they have 3 starters back on the offensive line led by 2nd team Southland OL's Khalil Corbett-Canada and Jakob Sell. I like all the pieces of the offense but they clearly need a QB to emerge.

The defense allowed 434 ypg in Laird first 3 years. Last year the run D allowed just 3.9 ypc the best in at least 10 years. The pass D did give up 302 ypg but they had 9.1% sacks. The good news on defense is that 12 of the top 14 tacklers return only losing LB Blake Stephenson (#2 tklr) and LB Rahuad Powell (#8 tklr). On the first team Southland preseason Defense is LB Jomard Valsin (#1 tklr, 3 sk) and 2nd team preseason Southland members in LB JaQuay Pough (#1 tklr '20, #4 tklr '21, 3 sk), DB PJ Herrington (#3 tklr, 2 pbu) who is the QB of the defense and DB William Hooper (3 pbu). Last year they returned 14 of the top 16 tacklers so this is a very veteran unit that should be the best yet under Laird.

P Scotty Roblow is back after averaging 41.7 per punt with a net of just 34.17. FG man Eddie Godina hit 6-12 FG with a long of 47 and one miss from 50 plus with 4 of his 6 misses being blocks. Top PR Donovan Duvernay had -2 yds on 6 returns but a super 28.3 on KR's and is 2nd team All conference. With all 3 back I look for significant improvement in this area.

Northwestern St has 7 starters back on Offense and 9 on defense and everyone from the special teams. Their 3 conference foes who they face twice this year are Southeastern, Mcneese and Houston Baptist. They were picked 5th in the 6 team league in the media poll and

while this should be Laird it will take some effort to finally break thru and have a winning season.