

Austin Peay 2019 Preview

Going into 2018, Austin Peay was coming off their most successful season since 1977, as they snapped their 29-game losing streak and won 8 games. The Governors returned 15 starters (8 offense, 7 defense) and the expectations for the season were pretty lofty under head coach Will Healy. However, the season did not go as planned as Austin Peay went 3-5 in OVC play and 5-6 overall. The Governors did manage to retain the Sgt. York Trophy, that they won for the first time in 2017. This season Healy moves on to Charlotte and the team returns just 10 starters. In steps Mark Hudspeth, who spent 7 seasons at Louisiana (51-38) and was 4-1 in bowl games. There are some holes on this team, but there is some talent back, and the Governors will look to bounce back.

Austin Peay went with a 2 QB system in 2017, and saw their offense put up the best numbers this decade (387 ypg, 27 ppg). The Governors went with that same 2 QB system last season, but Jeremiah Oatsvall so the majority of the playing time, as he started 8 games and passed for 1,631 yards (51.7%, 20-10) and ran for 517 yards (6.1, 6 TD). JaVaughn Craig (3 starts in '18) passed for 365 yards (52.8%, 2-1, 185 rush yards). The rushing attack was strong in '17 (259 rush ypg, 5.4 ypc) and while the numbers dipped a bit, the run game was solid again as Austin Peay rushed for 238 ypg (5.4). The run game was led by Kentel Williams, who led with 831 (8.0, 7 TD, 1st Team OVC), while QB Oatsvall was the #2 rusher and RB Ahmaad Tanner (339, 4.5) finished 3rd.

The Governors pass offense ranked 8th in the OVC (181.5 ypg), but standout WR DJ Montgomery led with 797 yards (19.0, 10 TD) and DeAngelo Wilson finished #2 with 478 (17.1, 7 TD). Montgomery departs this year, leaving Wilson as the top WR back and they do add a Ball State transfer Justin Gibbs (PS#155) and Louisiana transfer Keenan Barnes (PS#149). The biggest unknown on offense this year will be the OL, as the Governors lose 4 starters from the unit paved the way for an OVC-best 238 rush ypg and allowed just 9 sacks in 2018, including Byron Glass and Ethan Self who were both 2nd Team OVC. The good news is that Kyle Anderton (2nd Team OVC in '17, 4 starts in '18) is back after redshirting last year. He joins sophomores Seth Johnson (7 starts) and Jake Kilby (2 starts) as the only OL with starting experience. If this unit can come together, Austin Peay could once again lead the OVC in rushing. Austin Peay does bring back their kicker Logan Birchfield, who hit 5-7 a season ago.

In 2017 Austin Peay had an pretty stout defense, allowing 311 ypg and 25 ppg for easily their best marks of the decade. With 7 starters back last season, those numbers jumped up a bit to 384 ypg and 31 ppg allowed. Going into '19 the losses on defense are much greater as just 4 starters return. Up front, the Governors lose all 4 starters from a year ago, including DE's Nate Howard (7 starts, #5 tackler, 10.5 TFL) and Jaison Williams (11 starts, #6 tackler, 9.5 TFL, 4.5 sacks, 1st Team OVC) chose to not return to the team. The Governors only play 2 LB's (4-2-5 defense) and return Pat Walker (11 starts, #4 tackler, 4 TFL) but lose 1st Team OVC LB Gunnar Scholato, who led the team with 109 tackles (11.5 TFL).

The five-man secondary had the second-best pass defense in the OVC in 2018 (212 pass ypg), and they return 3 starters from that unit in CB Trent Taylor (9 starts, #7 tackler, 7 PBU, 2 INT), 2nd Team OVC FS Juantaruis Bryant (7 starts, #3 tackler) and NB Kordell Jackson (8 starters, t-#8 tackler, 5 PBU, 2 INT). The Governors do lose 2nd Team OVC SS Malik Davis (11 starts, #2 tackler, 4 PBU, 4 INT) and CB Keawvis Cummings (6 starts, #13 tackler, 12 PBU, 2 INT) who transferred to Indiana State. Austin Peay will also return their punter, Devin Stuart, who averaged 41.0 yards per punt (L/65).

The Governors open the season with four straight non-conference games, and that includes some tough foes such as hosting Central Arkansas in Week 2 and traveling to East Tennessee in Week 4. The schedule does not get any easier after that as the following 2 games see the Governors host Jacksonville St and SE Missouri. This schedule will make for a challenging season for Austin Peay, but if they can reach the 6 win mark and secure a winning record, it would be quite the accomplishment.