

McNeese St 2019 Preview

McNeese ended 2017 with a 9-2 record and finished ranked #22, but missed the playoffs. Last season the Cowboys brought back 10 starters and started the year 5-1, which included a win over eventual Southland champion Nicholls. McNeese was ranked as high as #6, but would go on to win just 1 of their final 5 games and finished 6-5. McNeese did not renew Lance Guidry's contract despite going 21-12 over his 3 seasons. The Cowboys brought in Sterlin Gilbert, who was the OC at Texas in '16 and the OC at South Florida in '17-'18.

McNeese's offense has been strong for much of the decade, averaging under 400 ypg just 2 times since 2011 (398 ypg in '15, 397 ypg in '14), but last season despite having 7 starters back, the Cowboy offense took a tumble. After averaging 420 ypg the first 2 weeks, McNeese's offense put up just 248 ypg the next 7 weeks before gaining 318 and 305 yards in their last 2 games. This season just 4 starters are back on offense for McNeese. QB James Tabary hit just 56% and passed for 1,576 yards (8 starts, 12-7 ratio) and departs, while backup QB Cody Orgeron (son of LSU HC Ed Orgeron) returns for the Cowboys after starting 3 games and passing for 406 yards (55.6%, 2-3 ratio) and running for 148 (3.4). Three of the top 4 RB's depart for the Cowboys including their top rusher David Hamm (7 starts, 488, 4.9, 4 TD) while the top RB returning is Justin Pratt (2 starts, 320, 3.4).

The Cowboys pass attack brings back just 2 of the top 6 receivers, but those 2 players are Cyron Sutton who was #1 on the team with 609 receiving yards (5 starts, 3 TD) and #3 WR Trevor Begue (4 starts, 240). Departing is Kylon Highshaw (8 starts, 258, 3 TD), Parker Orgeron (5 starts, 157) and TE Austin Nelson (7 starts, 132). Last season 4 OL starters returned and the run game averaged 173 ypg while allowing 26 sacks. This season 3 starters are back on the OL including 1st Team SLC LG Grant Burguillos, but lose a two-year starter at LT Kyle Zenon. Kicker Gunnar Raborn, who hit 16-22 (L/42) FG's last season, departs.

McNeese had an elite defense in '17 as they held teams to just 263 ypg and 17 ppg. Just 3 starters returned from that unit last season, but the unit only took a bit of a step back, allowing 356 ypg & 24 ppg. The DL had to replace all 4 starters from a unit that held teams to 54 rush ypg in 2017. McNeese's run defense still held foes to 120 ypg (3.4) and this unit was led by DT Jonta Jones (11 starts, #5 tackler, 3.5 tfl) as well as DE's Cody Roscoe (11 starts, t-#7 tackler, 4.5 sacks) and Chris Livings (5 starts, #11 tackler, 8 sacks, 2nd Team SLC). All 4 starters for the DL return this season & should be strong once again. The Cowboys play a 4-2-5 defense and both starting LB's BJ Blunt (10 starts, #1 tackler, 11 sacks, 9 TFL, 6 PBU, 1st Team All-American) and Christian Jacobs (10 starts, #2 tackler, 6 TFL) both depart while Tre Porter (2 starts, t-#9 tackler) is the top returning LB.

Since 2013, the highest completion percentage the McNeese pass defense has allowed is 51.9 percent! Though the Cowboys lost 4 players with starting experience going into last year, the pass numbers did not slip too much. McNeese did allow a 56.5 completion percentage & 236 pass ypg, but that was only down from 50.8% and 208 pass ypg allowed in '17. In their 5-man secondary McNeese brings back 6 players with start experience & 4 starters, including BUCK Cory McCoy (11 starts, #3 tackler, 6 TFL, 7 PBU) and CB's Darion Dunn (7 starts, t-#7 tackler, 9 PBU, 2 INT) and Colby Burton (11 starts, t-#9 tackler, 8 PBU, 2 INT, 1st Team SLC). The lone starter lost is SS Trent Jackson (11 starts, #4 tackler, 6 PBU), so a veteran DB group returns & improved numbers should be expected. The Cowboys lose their 1st Team SLC P Alex Kjellsten, who averaged 43.8 yards per punt (L/66, 21 punts I/20).

McNeese hired an offensive-minded HC and he will look to get that unit going in '19, while the defense side of the ball should be stout once again with 8 starters back. Their schedule kicks off with 2 of the tougher SWAC teams in Southern and Alcorn State, but McNeese gets those games at home. While Incarnate Word (#2 SLC last year) drops off their schedule, the Cowboys 4 road SLC road games come against 4 teams that finished ahead of them in Nicholls, Lamar, Abilene Christian, and Central Arkansas. It will not be easy for McNeese to top their 6-win total from last season, but the talent is here to accomplish that this season.