

Nicholls 2019 Preview

Nicholls enters 2019 off of back-to-back winning seasons after going a decade without a winning season (6-5 in 2007). The Colonels are 14-4 in conference play the past 2 seasons and have come close to beating teams like Texas A&M (24-14 loss) in '17 and Georgia (26-24 loss) in '16. Nicholls did beat Kansas last season 26-23 and finished 9-4 after a 41-24 second-round playoff loss to Eastern Washington. Expectations are high under 5th year HC Tim Rebowe (25-22), who has truly turned this program around in his time here.

Going into the 2018 season, the Colonels offense was coming off a season where they averaged over 400 ypg (402) for the since '13. The experienced offense took off last year, averaging 474 ypg and 32 ppg. SLC Player of the Year QB Chase Fourcade returns for his senior season after throwing for 2,930 yards (60.8%, 21-8) and rushing for 659 yards (4.3, 13 TD). The explosive Colonels offense returns their top rusher from '18 in Dontrell Taylor (12 starts, 990, 7.2, 9 TD, 2nd Team SLC) along with PS#42 RB Kendall Bussey (1 start, 563, 4.4, orig Texas A&M) and Julien Gums (544, 6.8, 6 TD).

Though Nicholls focused more on the run than the pass (63% run vs 37% pass), the receiver unit was still highly productive and Damion Jeanpiere led the way with 850 yards (13 starts, 3 TD) and Dai'Jean Dixon was #2 (753, 7 TD). Dixon (13 starts, 2nd Team SLC) and TE Jordan Talley (11 starts) are the 2 starters back, while Jeanpiere and Gabe Fuselier (10 starts, 296, 4 TD) both depart. While losing 2 starters hurts, 6 of the top 8 return and this unit should not see much of a drop off. Nicholls returned 4 starters to the OL last year and this strong unit paved the way for 247 rush ypg (#11 FCS) and over their final 6 games the run game put up 292 ypg (5.9). This season though the losses are heavy as 4 starters depart, including C Ryan Hanley and RT Chandler Arceneaux, who were both 1st Team SLC along with 2nd Team LT Eddie Houston. New players will have to emerge on the OL if the run game is to replicate their 2018 output, and PS#112 OL Caleb Etienne could play a factor this year. Nicholls also loses K Lorrان Fonseca, who hit 16-26 FG's with a long of 56 yards!

While Nicholls offense was explosive last year, their defense was highly productive as well as they improved to allow 337 ypg & 22 ppg and collected 41 sacks (#1 SLC) in 2018. This season the Colonels bring back 6 starters on this side of the ball. Two of those starters returning play on the DL in NT Brandon Fontenot (13 starts, #15 tackler) and DT Sully Laiche (13 starts, 8.5 sacks, 8.5 TFL, 1st Team SLC), but lose DE Kenny Dotson (13 starts, #13 tackler, 4.5 sacks) and DL Ronald Ollie (t-#11 tackler, 8.5 TFL, 5 sacks) who was signed by the Oakland Raiders. The LB unit also brings back a pair of starters in Evan Veron (12 starts, #3 tackler, 15 TFL, 7 sacks, 1st Team SLC) and Aquindas Steib (9 starts, #9 tackler) along with part-time starter Allen Pittman (4 starts, t-#6 tackler, 4.5 TFL) who was 2nd Team SLC.

Nicholls pass defense held their foes to under 60% on completions from 2015-17, and in 2018 they allowed exactly a 60% completion rate and gave up 225 pass ypg (#2 SLC). While the Colonels return 2 starters in 2nd Team SLC FS Khristian Mims (13 starts, #1 tackler, 5 PBU, 2 INT) and 2nd Team SLC CB Darren Evans (13 starts, t-#11 tackler, 8 PBU, 2 INT) they will have to fill 3 starting positions. SS Corey Abraham (13 starts, #2 tackler, 3.5 TFL), NB Ahmani Martin (13 starts, #4 tackler, 8.5 TFL, 6 PBU, 2nd Team SLC) will be missed in the Colonels secondary along with Jonavon Lewis and Austin Dickerson who split starting time at the other CB spot. Despite the loss of 5 starters and a player who made an NFL training camp roster, Nicholls defense still possesses quite a bit of talent and will be strong again in 2019. 2nd Team SLC P Winston Jones, who averaged 41.4 yards per punt (L/75), returns this season for Nicholls.

While the Colonels bring a talented team back, they will have to navigate a schedule that includes 2 FBS teams in Kansas State and Texas State and one of the top SWAC teams in Prairie View A&M. Nicholls does benefit from getting both McNeese and Central Arkansas at home, and their toughest SLC game could come Oct. 19 when they travel to face Sam Houston State. If the Colonels' OL can come together and the rest of the team stay healthy, we could see Nicholls winning the SLC again and reaching the playoffs for a 3rd straight season.