

SE Louisiana 2019 Preview

Coming into 2018, SE Louisiana was off of two straight winning seasons (7-4 in '16, 6-5 in '17) but have not reached the playoffs since back in 2014. Frank Scelfo took over as the SE Louisiana head coach last season, and the Lions nearly upset ULM in the opener, but started the season 0-3. SE Louisiana did win their next 2 games, including a win over playoff-bound Lamar on the road. The Lions would barely fall at Sam Houston St (28-25) and soundly beat McNeese 23-6. SLU would get shutout 44-0 in the season finale and finished the year 4-7.

SLU's offense put up 428 ypg and 35 ppg in '17 on their way to a 7-4 record. However, the Lions offense took a step back last year, gaining 407 ypg and 26 ppg. The Lions do return their QB, Chason Virgil (Fresno St transfer) who threw for 3,034 yards (59.5%, 17-13), which was the best mark in the Southland last year. Also joining SLU this season is QB Cole Kelley (PS#55) who passed for 1,302 (54%, 9-8) in 2 seasons at Arkansas. The Lions running game took quite a step back in '18, and the leading rusher, Darren Johnson, ran for 519 yards (6 starts, 4.9). Johnson and Julius Maracalin (2 starts, 200, 5.3) both depart, but the #2 RB Devonte Williams (3 starts, 293, 3.4) does return this season, so the cupboard is not completely bare. Williams also returned punts & was 1st Team SLC as a punt returner.

While the SLU run game took a step back in 2018, the Lions pass attack put up 281 ypg, their highest mark since 2011. Leading the receiver unit was Juwan Petit-Frere, who had 796 yards (7 starts, 5 TD, 1st Team SLC WR) and was also named 1st Team SLC as an all-purpose player & kick returner (471 KR yards). He returns along with TE Bransen Schwebel (6 starts, 484, 1st Team SLC), CJ Turner (5 starts, 422) and Austin Mitchell (5 starts, 352). The biggest loss at the receiver position is Nih-Jer Jackson, who had 8 starts and 336 yards. The OL paved the way for 283 ypg (5.8) and allowed just 14 sacks in 2017, but those numbers took a huge dip last season down to 126 ypg (3.5) and the Lions gave up 31 sacks. This season just 2 OL starters return (LT, LG) and this position could be an area of concern for the Lions this year. They do add PS#254 Wyatt Richthofen, who is a transfer from Southern Miss. SLU will have to find a new kicker, as 1st Team SLC K Jonathan Tatum departs after hitting 14-18 FG's (L/42) last year.

After allowing 375 ypg and 26 ppg in 2017, the Lions defense took a step back last season as they gave up 459 ypg and 34 ppg, but did increase their sack total to 24. Last season SLU played largely in a 3-3-5 scheme and they only lose main starter off the DL in Jon Miller (11 starts, t-#10 tackler, 1.5 TFL). Fred Brown (10 starts, #12 tackler, 5.5 TFL) returns along Ronald Cherry (2 starts, t-#15 tackler, 3 TFL). Four of the top 6 DL return, and the Lions should improve on their 184 rush ypg allowed last year. There is less experience returning for the Lions at LB though as they lose both Tamarcus Russell (10 starts, #1 tackler, 11.5 TFL, 2nd Team SLC) and Kyle Nevels (7 starts, #7 tackler). The lone starter back at LB for the Lions is Isaac Berglund (11 starts, #3 tackler, 6 PBU) who led the team with 6 sacks. Overall 3 of the top 4 LB's depart, and this unit is the biggest concern on the defense.

Last season the SLU pass defense gave up a decade-worst 275 pass ypg (63.3% completions allowed). This season Xavier Lewis (11 starts, #2 tackler, 3 PBU), Ferlando Jordan (11 starts, #6 tackler, 7 PBU, 3 INT) and Dejon Lynch (9 starts, #8 tackler, 6 PBU) all return for the Lions. However, SLU does lose 2 starters from the secondary in Brayleon Thorns (8 starts, #4 tackler, 3 PBU) and Zeke Walker (10 starts, #5 tackler, 4 TFL, 5 PBU). But overall 5 of the top 7 DB's return and this unit should be in better shape. SLU does lose their punter Ivy Wall, who averaged 40.9 yards per punt (L/56) in 2018.

After a down year for SLU (4 winning seasons the past 6 seasons) in 2018, they bring 12 starters back and a renewed sense of optimism to Hammond. The Lions non-conference schedule does them no favors, as they face Jacksonville St (9-4 in '18), Bethune-Cookman (7-5 in '18) and Ole Miss. While

the Lions do get all 3 Southland playoff teams from 2018 at home (Nicholls, Lamar, Incarnate Word) they do make trips to Central Arkansas and Northwestern St. While improvement is expected, SLU will have to fight hard to get 6 wins this season.