

Sam Houston St 2019 Preview

In KC Keeler's first 4 seasons at Sam Houston State, the Bearkats went 46-12 and reached the FCS Semifinals 3 times, twice losing to North Dakota State. Last season expectations were still high as SHSU began the year #4, but had their 21-game home win streak snapped by North Dakota in Week 2, and would go on to lose 4 more times to finish 6-5 and miss the playoffs. Keeler returns for year 6, and this team will look to bounce back from a down year by their standards.

The Bearkats offense in '16 and '17 was led by 2x Walter Payton Award winner Jeremiah Briscoe, who passed for 11,488 yards & 116 TD's in his career. Last year the offensive numbers dropped from 538 ypg & 43 ppg in '17 to 420 ypg and 30 ppg. Last season Mike Dare began as the starter, but was replaced after just 3 games by Ty Brock, who set the SHSU freshman record with 2,417 passing yards (57.1%, 15-12). Both QB's are back, but Dare is moving into a coaching role and Brock will compete Eric Schmid for the starting job. Last season SHSU lost a 1,000 yard rusher and Remus Butler (702, 6.2 in '17) was gone after 3 games. Kyran Jackson stepped up to lead with 809 yards (4.8, 8 TD), and returns this season, and SHSU adds as PS#12 RB in Toneil Carter, who transfers in from Texas, having rushed for 252 yards as a freshman in '17 before redshirting last year.

Two of the top 3 WR's from '17 returned for the Bearkats, and Nathan Stewart recorded his 3rd straight 1,000 yard season (11 starts, 1063, 5 TD, 2nd Team SLC). Stewart returns for this season along with Dee Bowens, who caught 31 passes for 528 yards. While SHSU gets back their #1 and #3 receivers, they lose both Davion Davis (8 starts, 569, 10 TD) and Tyler Scott (10 starts, 422). After rushing for 258 ypg in 2015, the rushing totals for SHSU have dropped 3 straight seasons. After rushing for 175 ypg (5.1) in '17, SHSU brought back 4 OL starters but the rushing total dropped to 124 ypg (3.3) and the sacks allowed rose to 35 (allowed 16 sacks in '17). This season just 2 OL starters return, and 4 return with some start experience, but will need some new names to step up. SHSU will have to replace K Tre Honshtein, who hit 36-45 FG's (L/46) the last 2 seasons.

Sam Houston has not fielded a defense that has held foes to under 400 ypg since 2012. In fairness, with the offense routinely averaging over 40 ppg in that time span the defense did not have always to be on their 'A' game. The defense in '17 allowed 455 ypg and 31 ppg. That defensive unit brought back 7 starters and improved a bit, allowing 420 ypg and 28 ppg. The Bearkats run defense allowed a decade-worst 208 rush ypg last season, but did collect 36 sacks. SHSU brings back 2 starters this season including 1st Team SLC DE Erick Fowler (10 starts, #10 tackler, 9.5 TFL, 5 sacks), but the unit loses DE Derick Roberson (7 starts, #4 tackler, 15 sacks, 5.5 TFL, 1st Team All-American). The Bearkats do add a major piece to the DL this season as Trace Mascorro, a 2-year starter at UTEP (22 starts, 56 tackles, 6.5 TFL in 2 seasons), joins the team.

In terms of points per game, SHSU's defense over the past 6 seasons has allowed between 28-31 ppg. Last season 3 of the top 5 LB's were back & the Bearkats gave up 28 ppg. This season SHSU returns their top 5 LB's, which include Hunter Brown (11 starts, #1 tackler, 6 TFL), Royce See (11 starts, #2 tackler, 6 TFL), and Tristin McCollum (11 starts, #6 tackler, 6 TFL). As for the secondary, they returned 3 starters last season & improved their pass defense, as they allowed 219 ypg on 54.2% completions. This season FS Daniel Adams (7 starts, #7 tackler, 2 PBU) returns as well as CB's Zyon McCollum (11 starts, t-#8 tackler, 8 PBU, 3 INT, 1st Team SLC) and Jaylen Thomas (11 starts, #16 tackler, 5 PBU, 2 INT). In total 6 of the top 8 DB's are back in 2019, with the biggest loss being FS Adrian Contreras (11 starts, #3 tackler, 6 PBU, 2 INT). SHSU will have to replace P Cameron Hearn, who averaged 39.1 yards per punt (L/68).

SHSU opens the 2019 season at New Mexico, a team they could hang with, then face a much easier foe in Oklahoma Panhandle the following week. Their final non-conference game is at North Dakota, a game SHSU likely has circled on the calendar after they ended their 21-game home win streak last year. When SHSU gets to their SLC schedule, the Bearkats will face all 3 Southland playoff teams from 2018 (Nicholls, Incarnate Word, Lamar) all at home. SHSU only has 3 true conference road games, but 2 are against McNeese and

Central Arkansas. The Southland is definitely better than in years past, and while SHSU is an improved team on paper, they will face several tests this season. This team is out to show last year was a fluke and are motivated to get back to the playoffs in 2019.