

## SE Missouri 2019 Preview

Southeast Missouri enters year six of the Tom Matukewicz era, and are off arguably their most successful season in program history. After seven straight losing seasons, the Redhawks finished the regular season 8-3, with one of those wins coming against OVC foe Jacksonville State, which snapped the Gamecocks 36 game OVC win streak. Despite not winning the OVC, the Redhawks still made the FCS playoffs as an at-large team, and won their first-ever playoff game when they came back from a 14-0 deficit to beat Stony Brook 28-14. SEMO's playoff run ended a week later when they fell at Weber State 48-23.

After averaging 335 yards and 22 points per game from 2015-17, the Redhawk offense took flight last season. Led by QB Daniel Santacaterina (NIU transfer) and RB Marquis Terry, SEMO's offense put up 409 ypg (highest total since '14) and 37 ppg, their highest mark of the past decade. However, while the Redhawk offense put up 436 ypg and 39 ppg in the regular season, their offense was held to 254 ypg and 26 ppg in their two playoff games. Santacaterina (1st Team OVC) returns at QB after throwing for 2,844 yards (13 starts, 59%, 28-11) in 2018. While SEMO gets back 3 of their top 4 RB's, the lone loss is 2nd Team All-American and OVC OPOY Terry (13 starts) who ran for 1,229 yards and 14 TD's. Likely taking Terry's place will be Mark Robinson, who ran for 364 yards (4.9 ypc) in 2018.

Santacaterina will get back 4 of the 6 receivers from a year ago, including Kristian Wilkerson (13 starts, 2nd Team OVC) who led SEMO with 894 yards and 14 TD's. Zack Smith (13 starts, 477 yards, 5 TD) also returns, but SEMO loses their #2 WR Jerrick Orr (10 starts, 545 yards). The biggest losses on offense come along the OL as the Redhawks lose four starters from last year that started all 13 games and gave up 26 sacks (6.7%). Those four starters lost include 2nd Team All-American LT Drew Forbes and 2nd Team OVC C Lucas Orchard. The lone OL starter back is LG Elijah Swehla, and with 4 OL gone as well as their leading rusher in 2018, SEMO's strong rush attack from a year ago (177 rush ypg, 4.9 ypc) may take a step back. SEMO had two FG kickers last season that combined to go 14-20 on FG's, and they return Kendrick Tiller who hit 9-11 in 2018 but lose Nicholas Litang who hit 5-9 in 2018.

The Redhawk defense in 2017 put up their best marks of the decade as they allowed 346 ypg and 22 ppg. But last year the SEMO defense was rather inexperienced and took a big step back as they would allow 480 ypg (worst mark this decade) and 31 ppg. However, the Redhawks did lead the FCS with 36 TO's forced and TO margin (+24). SEMO's DL will return intact this season with all three starters as they will try to improve on their 185 rush ypg allowed last year. 2nd Team OVC DT Chance Thornton (13 starts, #9 tackler, 4.5 TFL, 3.5 sacks) and Ryan Ochoa (7 starts, #13 tackler, 6 TFL, 3 sacks) headline the starters back on the DL. The LB unit is the only one that loses a starter in Demarcus Rogers (13 starts, #5 tackler, 6 TFL), but return three starters including 1st Team All-American & OVC DPOY Zach Hall (168 tackles, 12 TFL, 4 INT) and 2nd Team OVC LB Justin Swift (13 starts, #2 tackler, 8.5 sacks).

After allowing just 206 pass ypg in '17, the Redhawk secondary (3 new starters) allowed 295 pass ypg. This year SEMO gets back all 4 starters including 1st Team OVC S Bydarrius Knighten (13 starts, t-#3 tackler, 9 PBU's) and CB DJ Freeman (13 starts, #6 tackler, 4 TFL, 16 PBU). This season the Redhawks will get back 19 of their top 24 tacklers and 10 starters return and an improvement appears likely for 2019. Punter Jake Reynolds, who averaged 41.3 yards per punt (L/71, 24 punts I/20), also is back for SEMO this season.

Head coach Matukewicz, who is the reigning OVC coach of the year, has a plethora of talent to work with in 2019 as 15 starters are back. There is some concern with the OL and run game, and the Redhawks must travel to Montana State and Missouri in their non-conference schedule and also travel to Jacksonville

State in OVC play. If the run game and OL comes together SEMO could be headed back to the playoffs for the 2nd straight season.