

SF Austin 2019 Preview

Since 2012 Stephen F. Austin has just one winning season, which was back in 2014 when the Lumberjacks went 8-5 and lost in the first round of the playoffs. Last season SFA was coming off a 4-7 season and brought quite a bit of talent back in 2018, but they did have to deal with a first-time interim head coach. Despite having a plethora of starters back, the Lumberjacks actually took a step back as they finished 2-8. This season SFA brings in a new head coach in Colby Carthel, who went 59-18 and won a national championship in 6 seasons at D-II Texas A&M-Commerce.

From 2010-2016 the SFA offense averaged over 400 ypg and 29 ppg every season, but in 2017 those numbers dipped to 331 ypg and 21 ppg. Last season with key starters back at every position the offense really showed no improvement as they averaged 347 ypg & their ppg dropped to 18. Jake Blumrick (6 starts) and Foster Sawyer (5 starts) split starts last season and combined for 2,488 yards (58.6%, 14-11). Sawyer departs this season, and while Blumrick returns he may be less than 100 percent to start the season after offseason back surgery. This would leave redshirt freshman Cam Arnold next in line at QB. The run game for SFA took a dip in production once again last season and the leading rusher Josh McGowen had just 372 yards (4.7). The top 3 rushers (814 yards, 5.5 ypc combined) all return and SFA will add Da'Leon Ward, a PS#53 RB who started 6 games (341 rush yds) at Texas Tech last season.

While the run game took a step back in '18, the pass offense still put up solid production (219 ypg). This season 3 of the top receivers return, including Tamrick Pace (7 starts, 623, 7 TD) and Remi Simmons (10 starts, 586). The lone departure of the top was the leading receiver Terian Goree (10 starts, 697). As for the OL last year, 4 starters returned but as mentioned above the run game took another step back to just 90 ypg (2.6) and the OL gave up 37 sacks. This season 3 OL starters return, and along with the top 3 RB's returning there is a chance the run game improves if some new faces step up. SFA's K Storm Ruiz returns this season after hitting 9-12 FG's (L/48) in '18.

The last time a SFA defense allowed fewer than 400 ypg and 29 ppg in a season was back in 2011 (306 ypg & 25 ppg). Though the numbers were still high, the SFA defense did drop their ypg allowed total for the third straight as they gave up 425 ypg. The SFA DL had to replace an NFL Draft pick, but returned 6 of the top 7 DL and gave up 197 rush ypg (4.8), which was a slight improvement. This season NT Rayshad Nichols (10 starts, t-#8 tackler, 3.5 sacks) returns along with 3 other players on the DL that started multiple games. The biggest loss up front will be DE Demetrian Amie (2 starts, #7 tackler, 5.5 sacks). The DL does add freshman Carl Williams (PS#157) to the unit as well.

SFA's defense lined up in a 3-3-5 setup last season and 6 of the top 7 LB's return this season, which includes Quin Jones (10 starts, #4 tackler, 5 TFL) and Anthony Jacobs (8 starts, t-#8 tackler, 5.5 TFL). The lone LB lost of the top 7 is Ryan Woods (10 starts), who led the team in tackles with 68. Last season the SFA pass secondary returned 3 starters and posted their best numbers since 2014, giving up 228 pass ypg and held opposing QB's to 55% completions. This year CB's Aretavious Hendrix (10 starts, t-#10 tackler, 6 PBU) and Jadarius Byrd (6 starts, #14 tackler, 5 PBU) as well as STAR safety Alize Ward (9 starts, #2 tackler, 2 PBU, 2nd Team SLC) and TIGER safety Trenton Gordon (9 starts, #5 tackler, 4 PBU). The lone starter gone is JACK safety Lawrence Ghansah (10 starts, #3 tackler, 2 TFL). With 6 of the top 8 DB's back along with 4 starters, this unit looks to be improved going into '19. The Lumberjacks will lose punter Caleb Lewallen, who averaged 40.2 yards per punt (L/62).

Under new leadership, SFA looks to be on the right track heading into 2019. Their non-conference schedule does include Baylor, but they also take on Southern Utah (1-10 in '18) on the road and host D-II Tarleton State. The Lumberjacks take on all 3 SLC playoff teams from 2018 (Nicholls, Incarnate Word, Lamar) and get 2 of those games at home, but face Central Arkansas on the road. With 16 starters back and a host of young talent joining the team in 2019, this team may not be in contention to win the SLC this year, but this team could be in the conference race by 2020.