

# Tennessee Tech 2019 Preview

Going into 2018 first-year HC Dewanye Alexander inherited 13 returning starters, but had some obstacles to overcome with the loss of some key players at crucial positions, most notably the QB and WR positions. While the offense improved slightly last year, the defense took a pretty massive step backward which was a big reason why the Golden Eagles finished 1-10 and 0-3 in the Sgt. York Trophy games. In fact TTU has only won the trophy 1 time, which was back in 2009. TTU returns 12 starters this season, and should see some improvement in the win column.

Last season TTU had to break in a new QB after their starter from 2017 transferred to LSU. They brought back Luke Ward (4 starts, 503, 50%, 5-2 in '17) but freshman Bailey Fisher won the job and started 10 games (1,681 yards, 52%, 11-7) and was named OVC Freshman of the Year. The rush numbers improved last season up to 140 ypg (102 rush ypg in '17) and Andrew Goldsmith was the leading rusher again (484, 3.9) while dual-threat QB Fisher was the #2 rusher (346, 3.3). With 2 RB's are back in Goldsmith & David Gist (198, 3.5) this unit could see more improvement in '19.

Tennessee Tech lost their top WR (1,003 yards, 6 TD) going into 2018, and their leading WR returning had just 97 yards in '17. There was not one WR to step up and take over the #1 spot, but QB Fisher spread the ball around as 10 players caught at least 10 passes last year. Darrius Stafford led with 371 yards despite starting just 2 games, while Josh Cunningham (9 starts) was #2 with 287 yards. Overall 9 of the top 11 players from this unit return and the pass game should also see some improvement. As for the OL, they returned 3 starters last year as the run game showed signs of improvement. This season 4 starters return & 7 total OL return that saw starting time in '18, and if you couple that with the fact TTU returns their top 2 RB's, the Golden Eagles run attack will likely improve. TTU does lose K Nick Madonia, who was 15-22 (L/52) on FG's last season.

As for the TTU defense, despite returning 6 starters a year ago their numbers fell to a decade-worst as the Golden Eagles allowed 526 ypg (#122 FBS) and 46 ppg (#123 FBS). TTU's defense collected just 10 sacks in '17 and that number only increased to 13 last year. This season the defense returns just 4 starters, including 2 on the DL in NT Xavier Schlueter (7 starts, #9 tackler, 2 TFL) and DE Chris Tucker (7 starts, #7 tackler, 4 TFL, 2.5 sacks). Backup DE Andrew Swicegood (3 starts, 7.5 TFL) also returns in '19. TTU runs a 4-2-5 scheme and they will lose both of their starting LB's from last season in Josh Poplar (8 starts, #2 tackler, 2 TFL) and Jake Warwick (10 starts, #4 tackler, 4 TFL). However, TTU does get back Aderick Moore (2nd Team OVC in '17) who started just 3 games due to injury in '18.

The TTU secondary returned 3 starters last year, but still gave up 289 pass ypg & allowed opposing QB's to connect on 72.2% percent of their throws. This season the Golden Eagles lose a trio of starters from this unit in S Deontay Wilson (11 starts, #1 tackler, 2.5 TFL), CB AJ Flemister (11 starts, #6 tackler, 2 PBU), and NB Eriq Fadahunsi (6 starts, t-#10 tackler). Along with S Shannon Faye (10 starts, #3 tackler, 5 TFL) and CB Dami Adekunjo (10 starts, #5 tackler, 5.5 TFL, 5 PBU) returning in the secondary, backup NB Tai Carter (23 tackles) who started 4 games in '18 also returns. Though just 4 starters are back, key reserves also return for the TTU defense and those woeful defensive numbers should hopefully get better. TTU had 2 punters in '18 in Luke Maynard (34 punts, 36.3 avg) and Nick Madonia (23 punts, 40.7 avg), but return just Maynard this season.

The Golden Eagles do get quite a bit of talent back on offense, and despite losing 7 starters on defense there looks to be some talent back on that side of the ball. Their non-conference schedule includes a trip to Miami (OH) and a home game vs Div-II UVA-Wise. TTU also faces Samford and Western Illinois in their non-conference slate. Four of TTU's last 6 games are at home, and should be able to get more than just a single victory in 2019.