

UT Martin 2019 Preview

Jason Simpson enters his 14th season as the UT Martin Skyhawks HC. Simpson is 80-68 during his tenure here and has won at least 6 games in 9 seasons. UT Martin made the FCS Playoffs in his first season here back in 2006, but have not been back since. On paper the 2018 season did not go well for the Skyhawks, finishing 8th in the OVC (2-6) and ended the year with a 2-9 record. However, if you look at their schedule UTM lost 6 games by 10 points or less meaning the Skyhawks were in most of their games and they went 2-1 in their Sgt. York Trophy games. UTM brings back only 10 starters (6 offense/4 defense) this season and will have to break in 7 new defensive starters from a unit that was 3rd in the OVC a year ago.

UTM's pass game took a step back in '17 as they averaged 161 ypg, but with QB Dresser Winn back the pass game took a step forward (267 ypg). Winn started the first 7 games and threw for 1,601 yards (65.8%, 12-9) before suffering an injury that cost him the rest of the season. However, Joe Husdon came off the bench, started the last 4 games and threw for 1,028 (343 yds vs SEMO, 354 yds vs Tenn Tech) and a 5-6 ratio. Both QB's are back in '19 and this unit should be productive again. Despite the top 3 RB's back in '18 the UTM run game did not improve much, going from 137 ypg (3.6) in '17 to 141 ypg (3.8). LaDarius Galloway (2nd Team OVC in '17) led with 540 yards (4.0, 5 TD) while QB Hudson was #2 (250, 4.0) and Jaimiee Bowe was #3 with 244 (4.5, 7 TD). Galloway departs this year, but Bowe (3 starts) and Peyton Logan (223, 5.0) are back and the run game may not take too much of a dip.

Two of the top 3 WR's were gone for UTM heading into '18, but Jaylon Moore was back & led with 799 yards (11 starts, 8 TD) while Terry Williams came in & finished #2 (2 starts, 736 yards, 3 TD) while Rodney Williams was 4th (7 starts, 252 yards). Overall 4 of the top 5 WR's are back, with the lone loss being Devonte Howard (11 starts, 387 yards). Just 2 starters were back on the OL for UTM last year, which could explain why their rush ypg barely improved and the line gave up more sacks (25) than '17. This year 3 players with starting experience are back on the OL (C, LG, LT), and this unit could show some improvement in '19. K Ryan Courtright (13-15 FG's in '18) returns this season.

2017's version of the Skyhawk defense was quite talented in 2017, as they allowed just 274 ypg (2nd in OVC) and 14 ppg (1st in OVC) on the season. Last year 5 of the 6 starters from up front, while all 5 of the secondary starters departed and the rush defense stayed strong (126 ypg, 3.2 ypc allowed) while the pass defense regressed to allowing 237 ypg (160 pass ypg allowed in '17). Up front 2 starters return for this unit in Julian Crutchfield (11 starts, #8 tackler, 9 TFL, 2nd Team OVC) and Austin Pickett (11 starts, #9 tackler, 5.5 TFL). All 3 starting LB's depart for UTM this season in James Gilleylen (11 starts, #1 tackler, 13 TFL, 2nd Team OVC), Kevin Prather (9 starts, #2 tackler, 10 TFL, 4 sacks) and Garrett Wall (10 starts, t-#4 tackler, 4.5 TFL).

The Skyhawks secondary lost all 5 starters from '17 and predictably the pass defense was not as strong. This season UTM does return a pair of starters in S Wanya Moton (11 starts, t-#4 tackler, 5 PBU) and CB DaVonte Maura (11 starts, #6 tackler, 9 PBU). However, 4 players from this secondary that saw significant starting time depart, including S Porter Streater (11 starts, #3 tackler, 4 PBU) and CB Andrew Horton-Martindale (11 starts, #7 tackler, 7 PBU, 3 INT). However, the unit does add Cam Ordway (PS# 70) who is a grad transfer from Ole Miss. With 7 starters gone from this unit, they could be in for another decline in defensive production. P Zane Cox will be back in '19, after averaging 37.9 yards per punt (L/57).

Northwestern State (5-6 in '18) and Southern Illinois (2-9 in '18) are on the non-conference schedule along with Florida and Kentucky. UTM then opens OVC play off of a bye with Murray State and then travels to Eastern Kentucky. Later in the season the Skyhawks travel to SE Missouri and then the next

week host Jacksonville State. The OVC looks to be improved overall and while UTM did lose quite a few close games, they do bring back just 10 starters and could be in for another losing season.