



PREVIEW

OFFENSIVE OUTLOOK

Southeast Missouri enters its 2020 season as defending Ohio Valley Conference Champions.

SEMO is coming off back-to-back 9-4 seasons and NCAA Football Championship Subdivision Playoff appearances for the first time in program history.

The Redhawks completed the 2019 campaign tied for first in the OVC with Austin Peay to claim their first league title in nine years. SEMO went 7-1 in conference play with its only blemish coming at the hands of the Governors.

Now, as SEMO continues to navigate through the unprecedented times with the COVID-19 pandemic, the Redhawks are hoping to get the chance to keep their momentum going this fall.

The Redhawks return eight starters on offense, six on defense and every one of their starters on special teams.

Highlighting that contingent is four Preseason All-OVC selections in defensive back Bydarrius Knighten, offensive lineman Ja'Chai Baker, wide receiver Aaron Alston and kicker Kendrick Tiller.

Knighten is the team's top tackler back from a year ago and Baker is one of four starters returning on the offensive line. Alston is SEMO's leading receiver back and Tiller is the Redhawks top scorer.

SEMO was predicted to take fourth in this year's OVC Preseason Poll, but has the pieces in place to prove otherwise.

The Redhawks set to begin their seventh year under head coach Tom Matukewicz who has led SEMO to one OVC title, two FCS Playoff berths, the school's only FCS Playoff win and six

victories over nationally-ranked FCS teams. The Redhawks also carry a winning streak of 12-straight regular season home games into the upcoming 2020 campaign.

Matukewicz is also just one win away from becoming SEMO's all-time winningest coach during the schools NCAA Division I FCS era.

Not to mention, SEMO's present senior class is in position to become the all-time winningest senior class in program history. The Redhawks seniors from 2017-20 have won 21 games and need four more to break the current record of 24 that was set a short season ago.

Here is a complete rundown of the 2020 Redhawks:

Quarterback

All eyes will be on the quarterback position as SEMO works to replace two-year starter and All-OVC performer Daniel Santacaterina.

Redshirt-senior **Joe Pyle (Fallon, Nev.)**, freshman **Jalyn Williams (Atlanta, Ga.)** and Football Bowl Subdivision transfers **Christian Perez (Louisville)** and **Andrew Bunch (Nebraska)** will hook up in this year's quarterback race.

Pyle is the most experienced after seeing his first NCAA Division I action under center in 2019. He appeared in six games and made one start, completing 15-of-34 passes for 196 yards along the way. Pyle ran for 74 yards and one touchdown on 20 carries and was named OVC Newcomer of the Week on Oct. 27.

Williams redshirted and won the team's Offensive Work Most Valuable Player award based on his work with the prep team in practice.

Perez and Bunch widen the



depth at quarterback.

Perez redshirted as a true freshman at Louisville a year ago.

Meanwhile, Bunch spent the last three seasons at Nebraska, where he was a two-time Academic All-Big Ten selection and three-time Nebraska Scholar-Athlete. He played in two games in 2019 and threw for 320 yards and two touchdowns in five games during the 2018 season.

Redshirt-sophomores **Jacob Buie (Memphis, Tenn.)** and **Patrick Maddox (Kennett, Mo.)** the other quarterbacks on SEMO's roster.

Running Back

SEMO is again deep at running back with the return of junior **Zion Custis (Lovejoy, Ga.)** and redshirt-sophomore **Geno Hess (Peoria, Ill.)**.

Custis and Hess were equally impressive over the course of the 2019 season.

Custis led the Redhawks with 684 yards on 142 carries with an average of 4.8 yards per touch. He scored five rushing touchdowns and averaged 57 yards a game.

Hess followed close behind with 575 yards and six

touchdowns on 102 carries. He led the team with 5.6 yards per rush.

Custis and Hess ranked sixth and seventh in the OVC in rushing, respectively, as the Redhawks had the third-most productive rushing offense in the league.

Redshirt-freshmen **Q'Nairies Anderson (Charleston, Mo.)**, **Xavier Myers (Murfreesboro, Tenn.)** and **Rashaun Hyde (Festus, Mo.)** along with redshirt-junior **Brayden Hull (Wentzville, Mo.)** give SEMO more options in the backfield.

SEMO's ball carriers are under the direction of first-year running backs coach Andre Crenshaw.

Receivers

The Redhawks have another big hole to fill following the departure of All-American and record-setting wide receiver Kristian Wilkerson.

Of the seven players listed at receiver on the depth chart, three saw action in 2019.

Returning starters **Aaron Alston (Brighton, Tenn.)** and **Zack Smith (Louisville, Ky.)** headline the group.





2020 Offensive Depth Chart

Left Tackle

- 71 Ja'Chai Baker, 6-6, 295, R-Sr.*
- 75 Damon Mixon, 6-6, 260, R-Fr.

Left Guard

- 76 Terry Cook, 6-4, 295, Jr.
- 70 Shyron Rodgers, 6-3, 290, Jr.

Center

- 61 Dane Nelson, 6-1, 295, Sr.*
- 77 Sage Sobrado, 6-2, 280, Jr.

Right Guard

- 64 Jaden Rosenthal, 6-2, 305, Sr.*
- 73 Will Christopher, 6-3, 295, R-So.

Right Tackle

- 68 Nate Korte, 6-4, 305, R-So.*
- 73 Will Christopher, 6-3, 295, R-So.

Tight End

- 84 Austin Crump, 6-4, 245, R-Sr.*
- 87 Caleb Strauss, 6-6, 240, R-So.

Quarterback

- 8 Joe Pyle, 6-2, 207, R-Sr.
- 10 Jalyn Williams, 6-1, 200, R-Fr.
- OR -
- 3 Christian Perez, 6-1, 175, R-Fr.
- OR -
- 5 Andrew Bunch, 6-1, 215, R-Sr.

Running Back

- 2 Zion Custis, 5-8, 180, Jr.*
- 6 Geno Hess, 5-8, 195, R-So.

Wide Receiver

- 16 Colby Cornett, 5-9, 165, R-Sr.
- 4 Johnny King, 6-4, 180, Jr.

Wide Receiver

- 9 Zack Smith, 5-9, 190, R-Sr.*
- 86 Garrett Todd, 5-10, 165, R-Fr.
- OR -
- 15 Pervis Frazier, 6-0, 190, Jr.

Wide Receiver

- 85 Aaron Alston, 6-4, 285, Jr.*
- 7 Rashaan Palmer, 6-4, 195, R-Fr.

* - Returning Starter

Alston was second on the team behind Wilkerson with 687 receiving yards and four touchdowns on 51 catches. He averaged 13.5 yards per reception and 52.8 receiving yards a game.

Smith rated third on the team with 31 receptions for 207 yards and three touchdowns.

Redshirt-senior **Colby Cornett (Joplin, Mo.)** is SEMO's other returning receiver.

Cornett played in all 13 games and tallied 21 catches for 166 yards and a touchdown last season.

Rashaan Palmer (Chicago, Ill.) and **Garrett Todd (Lebanon, Tenn.)**, and junior college transfers **Johnny King (Northeastern Oklahoma A&M)** and **Pervis Frazier (East Mississippi CC)** are also in the mix.

Palmer and Todd both redshirted as true freshmen a year ago.

King participated in five games at Northeastern Oklahoma A&M in 2019.

Meanwhile, Frazier was East Mississippi Community College's second-leading receiver with 51 catches for 522 yards and one touchdown.

Tight End

Justin Kramer, who worked as an assistant coach at SEMO from 2008-12, returns to Cape Girardeau for his second stint with the Redhawks.

Kramer will coach the tight ends and inherits a strong group at that position.

Fifth-year senior **Austin Crump (Eureka, Mo.)** is at the top of the two-deep.

Crump missed the first three games of 2019 with a torn pectoral muscle injury. He finished the year with five receptions in a

total of 10 contests.

Redshirt-sophomore **Caleb Strauss (Warrenton, Mo.)** also played last season, although the majority of his time was on special teams.

Strauss had his only reception for five yards at Missouri (Sept. 14).

Transfers **Jerome Afe (Allan Hancock College)** and **Will Weidemann (Ellsworth CC)** add depth at tight end.

Offensive Line

In what was a big area of concern a year ago, SEMO's offensive line is in excellent shape with the return of four starters.

Preseason All-OVC selection **Ja'Chai Baker (Council Bluffs, Iowa)** is back at left tackle, **Dane Nelson (Visalia, Calif.)** returns at center, **Jaden Rosenthal (Grandview, Mo.)** is back at right guard and **Nate Korte (Morris, Ill.)** returns at right tackle.

Baker (9), Nelson (9), Rosenthal (12) and Korte (12) combined for 42 starts up front

in 2019.

The only starter SEMO lost on its offensive line was First-Team All-OVC honoree Elijah Swehla.

Terry Cook (Elgin, Texas) is projected to take over as the Redhawks starting left guard.

Returns **Damon Mixon (Gainesville, Ga.)** and **Will Christopher (Girard, Ill.)**, and newcomers **Shyron Rodgers (Northwest Mississippi CC)** and **Sage Sobrado (Santa Barbara City College)** could see action, as well.

Mixon redshirted as a true freshman and Christopher played in one game during the 2019 campaign.

Rodgers was a two-year starter at Northwest Mississippi Community College, where he helped lead the Rangers to a 16-5 record over that span.

Sobrado spent the last two seasons at Santa Barbara City College.

Jason Onyebuagu, SEMO's third first-year position coach, will mentor the offensive line.

