

MATT VIATOR

McNeese's 14th & 19th Head Coach



THE RETURN OF A COWBOY FOOTBALL LEGEND

On Monday, McNeese Vice President and Director of Athletics Heath Schroyer announced the hiring of Cowboy Football legend and Hall of Fame coach Matt Viator to return as the head coach for the Cowboys, a position he held from 2006-2015 and recorded a school record 78 wins, four Southland Conference titles, and five playoff appearances.

He was selected Southland Conference Coach of the Year on three occasions. Viator also was named a finalist for National Coach of the Year honors three times.

During his tenure as head coach, McNeese averaged nearly eight wins per season and never finished with a losing record. His 78 wins are tied with Bobby Keasler for the most in program history. Viator produced an impressive 54-18 record (.750) in Southland Conference games during his 10 seasons, and his 54 league wins are the most in SLC history.

In 2015, Viator led the Cowboys to a 10-0 regular-season record and an appearance in the second round of the FCS Playoffs against Sam Houston State. It marked the fifth time in McNeese history that a team had posted a perfect regular-season record and the fifth time a squad had produced double-figure wins in a season. Viator, who led the Cowboys to a perfect 9-0 record in Southland Conference play, was named the league's Coach of the Year. He also was a finalist for both the Eddie Robinson and STATS FCS National Coach of the Year awards.

A total of 13 McNeese players were named All-Southland following the conclusion of the 2015 regular season. During his tenure in Lake Charles, Louisiana, Viator had a total of 97 players earn All-Southland accolades, including 53 named first-team all-conference selections.

The three-time Southland Conference Coach of the Year helped develop three SLC Players of the Year, two SLC Offensive Players of the Year, two SLC Defensive Players of the Year, one SLC Offensive Lineman of the Year, one SLC Newcomer of the Year, and two SLC Freshmen of the Year. Viator also had a total of 28 student-athletes earn All-Academic honors from the Southland Conference and five earn Academic All-America recognition.

McNeese nearly pulled off a monumental upset in the 2014 season opener at No. 19 Nebraska, but the Cowboys fell just short as Ameer Abdullah scored on a 58-yard touchdown reception with 20 seconds to play in a 31-24 Cornhusker win. The 70,000-plus in attendance gave a standing ovation to the visiting team.

The 2013 season saw the Cowboys post their second 10-win regular season under Viator at the time, eighth in school history, when they finished 10-3, including a 6-1 record in the conference. And for the second consecutive year, McNeese defeated an FBS opponent when it clobbered South Florida, 53-21. It was the first-ever win for McNeese over a BCS conference opponent. That win set a NCAA record as well as the 53 points scored by the Cowboys were the most-ever scored by an FCS team over a BCS team while the 32-point margin of victory also was an NCAA record.

His teams were ranked in the Top 25 in six of the last eight seasons and climbed to as high as No. 4 in the national polls for a couple weeks late in the 2013 campaign.

His offenses led the league in scoring five times, and in 2013, McNeese set school single-season records for total points scored (520) and ended the regular season ranked No. 4 in the nation in scoring offense, averaging a league-best 42.5 points per game. The Cowboys also set a school single-season record by scoring 50 or more points in five games.

Viator took over head-coaching duties four games into the 2006 season and led the Cowboys to a 7-5 record as they captured the Southland Conference title and appeared in the FCS Playoffs. He served as the team's linebacker coach in 1999 before assuming offensive coordinator duties in 2000.

Viator launched his coaching career at the high school level, first as an assistant coach for two seasons at Sam Houston High School from 1986-88. He spent 10 seasons as a high school head coach, including stops at Vinton (13-9 record from 1989-90), Jennings (38-12 from 1991-94) and Sulphur (30-16 from 1995-98). Viator won nearly 70 percent (81-37) of his games as a high school head coach, winning one state championship and five league titles while averaging more than eight wins per season. He was twice named Louisiana High School Coach of the Year (1992 and 1998).

His late father Nolan Viator was a three-time letterman (1959-61) at quarterback and two-time captain (1960-61) at McNeese. As a senior in 1961, he was named team MVP after leading the Cowboys to a 7-2 record and the Gulf States Conference Championship. Nolan, who later served as the backfield coach for the Cowboys for five seasons from 1982-86, was inducted into McNeese Hall of Fame in 1998.

Viator and his wife Schantel are both McNeese graduates.

VIATOR MCNEESE FAST FACTS

- 2007, 2007, 2015 SLC Coach of the Year.
- 2006, 2015 Louisiana Coach of the Year.
- 2006, 2007, 2015 FCS National Coach of the Year Finalist.
- 78-33 won-loss record during previous stint, tying with Bobby Keasler as most wins in school history.
- 78 overall victories tied as 3rd-most in Southland Conference history.
- 54-18 all-time Southland Conference record.
- .703 winning percentage 7th-best all-time in Southland Conference.
- .750 SLC winning percentage No. 3 all-time in league history.
- 54 SLC wins are a conference record.
- 2 Undefeated Regular Seasons (2006, 2015).
- Ranked in FCS Top 25 poll in 85 of a total of 108 weeks and received votes in 17 of the other 23 weeks.
- Ranked in the Top 10 in 42 weeks and the Top 5 in 12 weeks.
- Highest ranking was No. 2 in the final two weeks of the 2-15 season.
- Coached 36 All-American selections.
- 135 All-Southland Conference selections.
- 54 All-SLC 1st Team selections.
- 46 All-Louisiana selections.
- Coached the 2006, 2007 and 2009 SLC Player of the Year.
- 2008 and '13 SLC Offensive Player of the Year.
- 2008 and '15 SLC Defensive Player of the Year.
- 2010 SLC Newcomer of the Year.
- 2015 Louisiana Defensive Player of the Year.
- 2009 Louisiana Offensive Player of the Year.
- 2009 Louisiana Newcomer of the Year.
- Won 10 or more games in three of his 10 seasons and never had a losing season.
- Averaged over 8 wins a year.
- A 2021 McNeese Hall of Fame Inductee.