



FLORIDA STATE

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ACC ATL.

OVERALL



FLORIDA STATE					
5-YEAR WIN TREND					
14 (P) Oregon	(B) Houston	CLEMSON	CLEMSON	Florida	Notre Dame
13 (CG) Ga Tech	CLEMSON	UNC	BC	NC STATE	CLEMSON
12 Florida	GA TECH	LOUISVILLE	LOUISVILLE	MIAMI	MIAMI
11 BC	Florida	(B) Michigan	NC STATE	Alabama	SYRACUSE
10 MIAMI	UT-Ch (FCS)	Florida	BC	(B) S. Miss	VA TECH
9 VIRGINIA	NC STATE	SYRACUSE	UL-Monroe	Florida	WAKE FOREST
8 LOUISVILLE	SYRACUSE	WAKE FOREST	Del St (FCS)	NC STATE	LOUISVILLE
7 Notre Dame	LOUISVILLE	MIAMI	SYRACUSE	DUKE	N. Illinois
6 SYRACUSE	MIAMI	USF	WAKE FOREST	Samford (FCS)	
5 WAKE FOREST	BC	Char. S. (FCS)			
4 NC STATE	USF	Ole Miss			
3 CLEMSON	Texas State				
2 Citadel (FCS)					
1 OK State					
2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	
JIMBO FISHER				TAGGART	

The longest active bowl streak in the nation at 36 straight years. 42 straight years without a losing season. Most wins in the last 40 years. The best 5-year recruiting average in the ACC, and 4th best nationally. A national championship 5 years ago, a Heisman 5 years ago, and another undefeated season 4 years ago.

This was the firepower and tradition that Willie Taggart inherited at Florida State. And he trotted out the school's worst team since 1976, breaking the bowl streak, finishing with a losing record, and losing by a combined 100-24 to rivals Florida and Clemson.

In our Game Grader that evaluates a team's performance in each game, adjusted for opponents, Taggart had the worst impact from 2017 to 2018 among 1st year head coaches. Additionally:

- #1 Worst Decline: Pass Defense
- #2 Worst Decline: Scoring Defense
- #4 Worst Decline: Rush Yards / Carry
- #10 Worst Decline: Scoring Offense
- Most Penalized Team in America
- #1 Worst Decline: Game Grader (1st year coaches)

FLORIDA STATE				
2018 RESULTS	Yard +/-	TO +/-	GRADE	
VA TECH L 3-24	8	-5	19.8	
SAMFORD W 36-26	-71	4	FCS	
SYRACUSE L 7-30	-201	-1	10.1	
NIU W 37-19	252	-4	75.0	
LOUISVILLE W 28-24	-51	2	41.1	
MIAMI FL L 27-28	-106	-1	40.5	
WAKE FOREST W 38-17	116	0	78.1	
CLEMSON L 10-59	-277	-1	0.4	
NC ST L 28-47	28	-2	30.2	
NOTRE DAME L 13-42	-173	0	9.1	
BOSTON COLL. W 22-21	56	0	58.4	
FLORIDA L 14-41	-243	-3	6.0	
OVERALL: 59th / 65	ACC: 13th / 14		33.5	

This, coming off of a 6-6 season.

The new staff did inherit one of the worst offensive lines in Power 5 football, but that doesn't excuse the clueless playcalling and collapsing defense. Heading into his 2nd season, Taggart made one of the best coordinator hires of the offseason: Kendal Briles.

Can the scheme shift save the offense, return them to bowl season, and thus, save Taggart's job?

OFFENSE

There is quite the issue at offensive line. This unit was starting to deteriorate toward the end of 2017, but then the levee completely broke in 2018. Injuries, lack of development during the Jimbo Fisher era, and lack of improvement under Taggart's staff all built into a season-defining collapse.

FSU used 9 different starting lineups (in just 12 games), the offensive line coach was obviously fired, and they expect all 5 new starters for 2019. It was the worst offensive line performance in a decade, right there with the lines Lamar Jackson had in front of him at Louisville. Except here, FSU didn't have a generational/Heisman athlete at quarterback to evade rushers, scramble, and consistently bail out the line's misses.

Taggart's Gulf Coast Offense, "Lethal Simplicity" failed in Year 1. His next move was to bring in an ace offensive coordinator and found a proven one in Kendal Briles. I am curious to see how their two philosophies mesh.

Taggart had roots with Harbaugh's Stanford power run game with down blocking and gap schemes. But then he lacked the personnel to run it at USF, and evolved the offense to get his athletes into space. The resulting hybrid was dubbed the "Gulf Coast" after his location at the time. At Oregon, the Gulf Coast was mostly ignored for the 12 months Taggart was in the Pacific Northwest as he simply continued the Chip Kelly – Scott Frost – Mark Helfrich attack. Then, he was back to his roots at FSU, resulting in, well, take a look at the offensive stat box and you'll see a ton of 'deep red' nation-worst results.

Briles and his Baylor/FAU/Houston offensive machines were actually more focused on a physically dominating downhill run game in the box. Yes, they spread their receivers wide and sideline to sideline to stretch out the defense horizontally. Yes, they operate at hyper-tempo. And yes, their offensive linemen have very wide splits. But in this system, all these tactics are with the goal of opening up run lanes between the tackles, and outnumbering at the point of attack. Then, if the defense tries to stack the box to slow this run game, play-action opens up, and the speed receivers outrun the coverage.

We'll have to wait and see what the Briles/Taggart combination develops into. In the spring game, we saw a lot of quick passes and snap decisions by the quarterback. This could help mitigate the line's weakness, as these passes ask less of them in terms of time spent pass protecting.

At quarterback, expect pro-style James Blackman to be the starter. He was thrown into the starting role right away as a true freshman in 2017 with Deondre Francois' injury. Blackman played fine over the first half of 2017, and then actually improved noticeably to end his debut

FLORIDA STATE				
BEST/WORST GAME GRADES (LAST 5 YEARS)				
YEAR	OPPONENT	W/L	SCORE	GRADE
2016	FLORIDA	W	31-13	104.8
2016	USF	W	55-35	100.0
2016	BOSTON COLL.	W	45-7	98.5
2015	FLORIDA	W	27-2	95.1
2015	LOUISVILLE	W	41-21	93.3
2018	CLEMSON	L	10-59	0.4
2016	LOUISVILLE	L	20-63	1.0
2018	FLORIDA	L	14-41	6.0
2014	OREGON	L	20-59	6.9
2017	BOSTON COLL.	L	3-35	7.8

FLORIDA STATE		RANK	
Scoring Offense	21.9 ppg	113	
Points per Play	0.31	115	
Total Offense	361 ypg	103	
Yards per Play	5.1	109	
Rushing Offense	91 ypg	127	
Yards per Carry	2.8	128	
1st Down YPC	3.5	125	
Explosive Rush	4.8	128	
Passing Offense	270 ypg	28	
Yards / Attempt	7.1	82	
QB Rating	126	93	
Sacks / Attempt	8%	85	
Explosive Pass	7.6	63	
Return. Production	74%	33	

FLORIDA STATE		RANK	
Scoring Defense	31.5 ppg	90	
Points per Play	0.4	72	
Total Defense	416 ypg	80	
Yards per Play	5.2	41	
Rushing Defense	148 ypg	48	
Yards per Carry	3.5	20	
Negative Play %	7%	104	
Explosive Rush	5.3	15	
Passing Defense	269 ypg	119	
Yards / Attempt	7.1	61	
QB Rating	131	70	
Completion %	54.5%	19	
Explosive Pass	6.7	81	
Return. Production	80%	17	

season. After a redshirt year, and some physical development, he is the presumed starter. Interestingly, 3-year starting quarterback at Wisconsin Alex Hornibrook is here in Tallahassee. I don't quite understand the move, as Hornibrook spent his career in the Big Ten West, running the quintessential Big Ten West offense. This doesn't seem like a scheme fit.

At running back, Cam Akers was the former #3 overall recruit in the 2017 class, but was clamped down by the weak offensive line. FSU finished #127 (of 130) in rushing yards per game, falling below 100 yards per game. His ceiling is sky-high with a new line and coordinator. Behind him Khalan Laborn is looking quick and confident after missing 2018 with a knee injury.

Overall, FSU returns 74% of offensive production, most notably at receiver. Besides 2018 leader Nyqwan Murray, the next 7 pass catchers are all back. Tamorrion Terry will be the #1 guy this fall, and Keyshawn Helton continued his huge yards/catch from last year, averaging 20 per catch in the spring game (16 per in '18). Look for D.J. Matthews in the slot.

You could have expected some growing pains going from pro-style Fisher to spread/tempo Taggart. And some of it will be improved by Briles. He has never gone backwards: 3 for 3 in terms of improving the hand he's dealt at different programs.

DEFENSE

For as crippling the offensive line was to the offense, those guys didn't allow 59 (Clemson), 47 (NC State), 42 (Notre Dame), and 41 (Florida). The offensive line didn't allow 525 yards to FCS Samford.

This side of the ball had issues of its own, and compared to 2017, they regressed in every single defensive metric. The optimist can note that, like the offense, a ton of experience is back. FSU's defense returns 80% of its production from 2018 which is good for 17th nationally and 2nd in the ACC behind only the super young Bud Foster group at Virginia Tech.

You could see that defensive coordinator Harlon Barnett wanted to go aggressive – he is in fact a Mark Dantonio disciple after all. And despite the youth of 2018, they accomplished some of the goals of an aggressive defense: #19 in completion percentage against, #20 in yards per carry against. But overall, the total package wasn't strong enough. Teams were able to hit a ton of big passing plays, and FSU struggled to disrupt plays behind the line of scrimmage (just #104 negative play %).

Pass rush was the issue. It doesn't help that 3 defensive linemen are gone, including Brian Burns declaring early for the draft. Two 4-star linebackers departed through the Transfer Portal. Otherwise, everyone's back.

The duo of rising juniors Marvin Wilson and Cory Durden are both back along the interior of the line, but the defensive end group is new/young and needs pass rush improvement.

The secondary has a proven starter in Stanford Samuels at corner and safety Jaiden Woodbey was all over the field as a freshman. Spring reports are saying 4-star Akeem Dent is pushing for a starting job and could take over Cyrus Fagan's spot. This group is loaded regardless of how the roles shake out.

OUTLOOK

Without the Briles hire, my view of Taggart and 2019 FSU would have been much lower. Taggart ran an extremely undisciplined program last year (dead last in penalties), they looked sloppy all year in execution, and he seemed clueless in playcalling.

Still, the raw talent here is too great to ignore. Even though recruiting took a slight dip this February, FSU is still #6 in the 5-year average. That's well ahead of NC State (#36), Louisville (#40), Syracuse (#57), Wake Forest (#60), and Boston College (#64).

With so much returning production on defense, and a 2nd year coordinator bonus, the defense will be improved. Meanwhile, Briles has a proven track record with boosting the offensive situations he inherits.

They will not push Clemson for the division title, but there is no reason FSU shouldn't return to beating up on the other Atlantic teams. The offensive line can't get worse, right?

FLORIDA STATE	
2019 SCHEDULE	
A. 31	*BOISE STATE
S. 7	UL-MONROE
S. 14	@ Virginia
S. 21	LOUISVILLE
S. 28	NC STATE
O. 5	--- BYE ---
O. 12	@ Clemson
O. 19	@ Wake Forest
O. 26	SYRACUSE
N. 2	MIAMI
N. 9	@ Boston College
N. 16	ALABAMA STATE
N. 23	--- BYE ---
N. 30	@ Florida

FLORIDA STATE		RANK / 65
All-Time Wins	544	57
All-Time Win %	0.675	10
Wins (Last 100)	544	42
Wins (Last 50)	426	8
Wins (Last 25)	228	6
Wins (Last 10)	97	9
Wins (Last 5)	45	10
Game Grader (5 yr)	56.9	23
Game Grader (3 yr)	51.8	30
Draft Picks s' 2000	108	7
Draft Picks s' 2010	53	7
Player Development: Recruit Rank ('13-'15) vs. Draft ('17-'19)		58
Win Conversion: Recruit Rank ('10-'18) vs. Wins ('14-'18)		45

FLORIDA STATE		GAME GRADER (RANK / 65)			
2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	
33.5 (59)	49 (37)	72.9 (9)	66.2 (12)	63.1 (20)	

