

**August 17, 2009**

## **Tulane Football Predictions—2009**

### **Yes We Can!**

**Last year, I predicted that Tulane would have a record of five wins and seven losses. For a while, it appeared that my forecast was unduly pessimistic. Tulane opened the season with a very good effort against an Alabama team that went on to win twelve games. In its second game, the Green Wave nearly upset East Carolina, which at the time was ranked in the Top 25. Tulane then defeated UL Monroe and SMU. The Greenies seemed well on their way to a winning season and a bowl game. Alas, it was not to be.**

**Everything turned around against Army, which entered the game with Tulane as a nineteen-point underdog. Miscues by the Green Wave early in the first quarter led to two quick Army touchdowns, and the Cadets won in a rout. The debacle against Army was followed by a heart-breaking defeat by UTEP. After trailing for much of the game, the Miners won by means of a long touchdown pass late in the fourth quarter. The Wave did not come close to winning again, losing its last six games by large margins. As the losses mounted, so did the injuries. All told, Tulane lost seventeen players to season-ending injuries.**

**Among the players sidelined were running back Andre Anderson and wide receiver Jeremy Williams. Anderson was one of the nation's leaders in rushing before he was injured, and Williams was Tulane's only real "deep threat." Without them, Tulane was unable to move the ball on offense with any consistency. The Wave's defense was fairly effective for the first four games of the season, but gave up more than forty points in six of the last eight games.**

**In view of what happened last season, it comes as no surprise that the media and preseason college football magazines have been less than enthusiastic about Tulane's prospects for 2009. The reporters covering Conference USA have predicted that Tulane would finish last in the conference. None of the football magazines has picked the Wave to finish higher than fourth in the six-team Western Division of CUSA. To add insult to injury, Tulane has even been included in some "Bottom Ten" rankings.**

**Judging by the Internet message boards that I read, Tulane's fans are much more optimistic than the media and the college football publications. The fans think that last season is ancient history, and that those who have relegated the Wave to the bottom of the college football pecking order don't know what they are talking about.**

**The lowly assessment of the Green Wave by the media and the magazines may turn out to be more accurate than the optimistic views of the fans. That has been the case for the past few years. However, this year, there are several reasons for believing that the 2009 season will be significantly better than last season.**

**A majority of the starters return on both offense and defense. Anderson and Williams are back, and they appear to have fully recovered from the injuries they suffered last year. Two stalwarts in last season's offensive line, Troy Kropog and Michael Parenton, have moved on to the NFL, but this year, the line is bolstered by the presence of Andrew Nierman and Pete Hendrickson.**

**Going into the season, sophomore Joe Kemp is the starter at quarterback. Last year, just when Kemp was about to take over as Tulane's starter, he was lost for the season (on a late hit) against Houston. Kemp has the physical skills necessary to succeed at his position. If he has mastered the mental aspects of running the offense, and if Anderson and Williams stay healthy, Tulane's offense should be much improved.**

**On defense, Tulane has a new defensive coordinator, Steve Stanard. Stanard has extensive experience as a defensive coach and coordinator. He played at Nebraska, and previously worked with former Nebraska coach Frank Solich at Ohio University. Tulane's schedule, particularly its conference schedule, contains a number of teams with high-powered offenses, but not so tough defenses. I don't know if Stanard will be able to stop these offenses, but I think he will be able to slow them down a bit. If he does, Tulane should be much more competitive within its conference.**

**In Ross Thevenot, Tulane has one of the best punters in the country. Thevenot's efforts should help to provide Tulane with good field position.**

**Another reason for optimism is this year's freshman class. As a group, the freshmen are as talented as any recruiting class Tulane has had in quite a while. A good number of the freshmen are capable of making a substantial contribution this year. Because of these talented newcomers, Tulane should have considerably greater depth at running back, wide receiver, and the defensive secondary than it had in 2008. The freshmen should also help to provide the Green Wave with better special teams play.**

**Of course, there are also reasons for caution in forecasting how the Wave will fare this year. One reason has to do with the schedule. Tulane opens the season with two tough opponents, Tulsa and BYU. Tulsa has beaten the Green Wave decisively in recent years, while BYU is ranked in the preseason Top 25. Also, five of Tulane's last six games are road games. It is obviously difficult for a team to keep winning when it is on the road week after week. In short, it will be a real challenge for the Wave to either start the season well or to finish strong.**

**Although Coach Stanard is well qualified to take charge of Tulane's defense, he is installing a new system. Stanard is, in fact, Tulane's fourth defensive coordinator in the past four seasons. I'm sure that Tulane's players are doing their best to adjust to the changes Stanard has made. Furthermore, Stanard's system is reportedly less complex than the one Tulane used last season. Nevertheless, learning yet another defensive scheme is clearly not an easy task.**

**In nearly every successful season Tulane has had during the past fifty years, the Wave enjoyed above average quarterback play. And in nearly all of those seasons, the quarterback who provided that level of play was a junior or senior. Although Joe Kemp has the potential to be a very good quarterback, he does not now possess the same degree of experience as the quarterbacks of the past did when they excelled.**

**I hope that Tulane is able to overcome the obstacles presented by the schedule, that the new defensive scheme works like a charm, and that Kemp plays like a seasoned veteran. I think that the Wave will at least do better than the most pessimistic media types have projected. In any event, I am convinced that Coach Toledo and his staff are making progress in their efforts to build a successful football program. The wins will come.**

**Now for my game-by-game predictions:**

**Game One (Home): Tulsa 35, Tulane 24.**

**Tulsa has had an exceedingly easy time against Tulane the past few seasons. In the last three years, the Golden Hurricane has outscored the Green Wave, 143-35. This year, Tulane will have the home-field advantage, and I'm sure the Greenies will give an all-out effort to get the season started on a winning note. I think they will make the result more respectable than it has been of late, but I fear the visitors have too much talent for the Wave. The game will be played on Friday night in order to accommodate ESPN. It has been a while since Tulane played at home at that time (it was during the 1960s, as I recall). However, if the Greenies defeat Tulsa, I shall recommend that they play all of their home games on Friday.**

**Game Two (Home): BYU 30, Tulane 27.**

**As I have noted, Brigham Young is ranked in the Top 25 going into the season. I foresee another all-out effort by the Green Wave, and another respectable showing, but, unfortunately, not a victory.**

**Game Three (Home): Tulane 26, McNeese State 21.**

**After a week off, Tulane returns to action in a game against McNeese. It will be the first meeting between these two schools. In this game, it will be the Cowboys who will be giving an all-out effort. They will have everything to gain and nothing to lose. However, for their part, the Greenies will have something to gain, namely, a win, and I think that is what they will get.**

**Game Four (Away): Tulane 34, Army 31.**

**History shows that regardless of its record when it meets Tulane, Army will play very well, and that the Green Wave had better do the same. After what happened against Army last season, Tulane should be ready to play this year, and will come away with a victory. Of course, I said the same thing last year.**

**Game Five (Home): Tulane 38, Marshall 28.**

**This will be Tulane's homecoming game, and I anticipate a good performance by the Green Wave and a victory over the Big Green.**

**Game Six (Home): Houston 37, Tulane 21.**

**Houston, like Tulsa, has beaten Tulane by big margins in recent years. The Cougars will likely have another explosive offense this season. Houston's defense was not nearly as strong as its offense was last year, and I expect that the Wave will be able to move the ball fairly well, but probably not consistently enough to outscore its opponent.**

**Game Seven (Away): Southern Mississippi 30, Tulane 17.**

**Last year, USM started slowly, losing six of its first eight games, but the Golden Eagles regrouped in time to end the regular season with a record of six and six, and then went on to win the New Orleans Bowl. Tulane has not defeated Southern Miss since 2002, and has not won in Hattiesburg, where this year's game will be played, since the early 1990s. I don't think the USM streak will come to an end this season.**

**Game Eight (Away): LSU 42, Tulane 20.**

**The Tigers once again have very high expectations, and although they must play several key SEC games on the road, they may live up to their expectations, provided they get good quarterback play. Tulane is in a favorable spot on LSU's schedule, between Auburn and Alabama. Moreover, the Green Wave has performed well against LSU during the past two years. However, an upset in Baton Rouge is most unlikely. Several years ago, the two schools entered into an agreement for a ten-year home and home series, but LSU is apparently no longer willing to play Tulane in New Orleans, so it may be a while before the Wave and the Tigers play each other again.**

**Game Nine (Home): Tulane 28, UTEP 21.**

**After the road games against Southern Miss and LSU, Tulane will play its final home game of the season against Texas El Paso. As noted previously, the loss to the Miners last season was a very tough one, and the Greenies will no doubt want to avenge last year's loss and end their home season on a high note. I think they will.**

**Game 10 (Away): Rice 27, Tulane 24.**

**Last year, Rice had its most successful season in many years. The Owls defeated Tulane very easily in the Superdome. Chase Clement, the quarterback who led Rice in 2008, has graduated, and some forecasters are predicting that the Owls will return to the losing ways which characterized their football program for so long. I'm not so sure. I think this year's game will be a lot closer than last year's game, but Rice will have the home field advantage, and I think they will edge the Wave.**

**Game 11 (Away): Tulane 34, UCF 24.**

**Central Florida enjoyed a very successful season in 2007, but last year, wins were nearly as scarce for the Knights as they were for the Wave. The Greenies will be on the road, but by this time, the Wave freshmen won't be playing like freshmen, and I think Tulane will win.**

**Game 12 (Away): Tulane 37, SMU 31.**

**Last year, Tulane took a big lead over SMU and then withstood a strenuous comeback effort by the Mustangs to gain a narrow victory. SMU, which started a freshman at quarterback, won only one game in 2008. The quarterback may be much better this season, but unless the Mustangs' defense is also much improved, the Wave should win again.**

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**While Tulane fans were agonizing over the Green Wave's losing ways last season, they couldn't help but notice that other private, academically oriented universities were doing much better. Rice, Northwestern and Vanderbilt all had winning seasons. Rice won ten games, Northwestern nine and Vanderbilt seven. Moreover, all three schools went to bowl games, Rice for the second year in a row, after a dry spell going back to 1961, and Vanderbilt, for the first time since 1982. Of course, Northwestern and Vandy are members of BCS conferences and share in the financial largesse those conferences receive, but Rice, like Tulane, is a member of Conference USA.**

**For the fans of the Wave, the success of their collegiate brethren was frustrating. It was frustrating because misery loves company. When Tulane's football team is struggling, the fans want the fans of other schools, particularly schools with similarities to Tulane, to suffer, too. The fans feel that if they are**

**not enjoying the football season, the fans of those other schools should not be enjoying the season either. When the fans of those schools are happy, it only adds to the discomfort of Tulane fans.**

**However, the success of Rice, Northwestern and Vanderbilt was also encouraging. If those schools can succeed in major college football, there is no reason why Tulane cannot do the same. If they can do it, we can as well. Yes we can!**

**Roll Wave!**

**Reuben I. Friedman**