

COLLEGE FOOTBALL



NO. 24 HOUSTON COUGARS | TULANE

8 P.M. TODAY, YULMAN STADIUM

TV/RADIO: ESPNU, 950 AM



Courtesy photo/University of Houston Athletics

Houston Cougars running back Kenneth Farrow, center, scored three of the team's seven rushing touchdowns in UH's 49-28 win over SMU on Oct. 8 at TDECU Stadium in Houston.

Down 3 starters, Coogs O-line pushes forward vs Tulane

By **ANTHONY OPPERMAN**
The Daily News

» HOUSTON

Major Applewhite summed up the feeling following the Houston Cougars' 49-28 win over SMU last Thursday in one tweet.

"Great win tonight!! Prayers for the injured gladiators who gave it up for their brothers," the UH offensive coordinator posted on Twitter after the game.

Among the "injured gladiators" were senior starting right tackle Zach Johnson, sophomore starting left guard Josh Thomas and sophomore starting left tackle Marcus Oliver.

Head coach Tom Herman revealed Monday that Johnson tore his ACL, MCL, meniscus and patellar tendon, a season-ending injury that will possibly require multiple surgeries.

Thomas suffered a high ankle sprain that tore a ligament off the bone according to Herman, and his injury, too, will require season-ending surgery.

Oliver, who suffered an ankle sprain, was the most fortunate of the group.

While medically cleared, Herman said Oliver would be evaluated in practice during the week to see if he is well enough to play against the Tulane Green Wave tonight in New Orleans.

"(Oliver) got beat a couple of times in the (SMU) game, not because he's not good enough but because he was favoring that ankle," Herman said.

The challenge for the Cougars and the offensive coaching staff is replacing a pair of starting offensive linemen who had appeared in 44 games combined in their collegiate careers.

The unit has also been without senior left guard Ben Dew, who is out for the season after having surgery on his toe following UH's win at Louisville on Sept. 12.

Being down three starters on the O-line heading into the matchup with Tulane is compounded by the fact that Green Wave's strength is its defense, especially upfront, according to Herman.

"Tulane is extremely talented on defense," Herman said. "They are the best front four that we'll have played all year, which coincides nicely with our lack of offensive line depth."

No. 24 Houston (5-0, 2-0 AAC) at Tulane (2-3, 1-1)

Line: Houston by 19.
Series Record: Houston leads 14-5.

WHAT'S AT STAKE: After entering the AP Top 25 poll this week for the first time this season, Houston aims to continue its climb in the rankings while remaining a front-runner in the American Athletic Conference. Despite some ugly early season losses, Tulane could still establish itself as a factor in the AAC with an upset.

KEY MATCHUP: Tulane's aggressive four-man defensive line, which has helped the Green Wave record 39 tackles for losses, against Houston dual-threat QB, Greg Ward Jr. Ward is the only player nationally to average over 200 yards passing per game (260.4) and over 100 yards rushing per game (110.8).

FACTS & FIGURES: Houston is ranked for the first time since 2011. ... First-year Houston coach Tom Herman, who was only the second coach in program history to win his first three games, is also one of only two new coaches in college football who remain unbeaten this season, along with Florida's Jim McElwain. Both coaches lead their teams into south Louisiana football venues about 80 miles apart this week, as No. 8 Florida plays at No. 6 LSU on Saturday night. ... Three of Houston's victories have come by 21 or more points. ... Junior linebacker Steven Taylor leads the nation in tackles for loss (2.4 per game) and is second in sacks (1.6 per game). ... Tulane has forced 12 turnovers through its first four games, which ranks second in the American and 20th nationally. ... The Green Wave's last win against a ranked team was in 1984 at No. 19 Vanderbilt. Since then, the Green Wave is 0-38 against the Top 25.

The Associated Press

As part of Houston's offensive line shuffle, senior Alex Cooper will shift from right guard to left tackle and senior Damien Parriss, who has appeared in nine career games, will take over at right tackle. Senior Carter Wall will move from left guard back to right guard, and redshirt freshman Mason Denley, who will be playing in just his third career game, will start at left guard.

"We've got to be really smart in terms of what we ask (the offensive

lineman) to do," Herman said. "To say that the playbook is wide open would be foolish because it's not. You've got to do a good job and kind of ease them in."

In addition to simplifying the playbook, Herman said center Colton Freeman could slide right or left to help in pass protection against Tulane's four-man front.

Additionally, Herman said the tailbacks may be asked to assist with chipping – or "chunking" as the team refers to it – on blocks and did not rule out the possibility of keeping a tailback and tight end in the formation to serve as extra blockers.

As far as the running backs are concerned, Kenneth Farrow said the unit will need to tighten up in order to take some of the burden off of the offensive line.

"We know with some young guys coming in, there's always going to be mistakes. Everybody makes mistakes," Farrow said. "To minimize that as much as possible by making sure we're running the right track and doing what we can do to help them out as much as we can is something we're going to be working on a lot."

While the pressure will be on the offensive line and O-line coach Derek Warehime to get the group ready, Farrow said the other members of the offense are prepared to step up and smooth the transition.

"We've really got to help those guys out as much as we can, too, until they get the hang of it," Farrow said. "I think the newer guys, they'll step in and they'll do a good job."

With three starters out for the season and six games remaining for the Cougars after tonight, the sooner the new guys on the offensive line get acclimated, the better.

"This problem is not going to go away in a week," Herman said. "It's not just a Tulane issue. It's going to be a season-long issue. We need to really think long and hard about what we're asking those guys to do."

Even though Houston's offensive line depth is being tested, Herman is not panicking. After all, the former Ohio State offensive coordinator utilized three different starting quarterbacks on the way to a national championship last season.

"We'll figure it out," Herman said. "There's been worse situations come up in the history of college football that teams have overcome, and we'll certainly overcome this one."

NEXT IN LINE

Houston Cougars game-by-game starters on the offensive line:

LEFT TACKLE

vs. Tennessee Tech at Louisville	Marcus Oliver
vs. Texas State at Tulsa	Marcus Oliver
vs. SMU	Marcus Oliver

LEFT GUARD

vs. Tennessee Tech at Louisville	Ben Dew
vs. Texas State at Tulsa	Ben Dew
vs. SMU	Carter Wall

CENTER

vs. Tennessee Tech at Louisville	Colton Freeman
vs. Texas State at Tulsa	Colton Freeman
vs. SMU	Colton Freeman

RIGHT GUARD

vs. Tennessee Tech at Louisville	Carter Wall
vs. Texas State at Tulsa	Carter Wall
vs. SMU	Alex Cooper

RIGHT TACKLE

vs. Tennessee Tech at Louisville	Alex Cooper
vs. Texas State at Tulsa	Alex Cooper
vs. SMU	Zach Johnson

SCOUTING TULANE



OFFENSIVE PLAYER TO WATCH



Devin Powell
QB | #1

Starting in place of Tanner Lee who is out with a concussion symptoms ... Making his 4th career start ... Has played in 4 games this season completing 5 of 8 passes for 69 yards and a touchdown ... Has appeared in 16 career games and has completed 52.2 percent of his passes.

DEFENSIVE PLAYER TO WATCH



Royce LaFrance
DE | #48

Recorded a career-best 4 tackles for a loss including a career-high 3 sacks on Oct. 3 against UCF ... Is 6 sacks from tying the school record (22.5) ... Is tied for 5th in school history with 30.5 tackles for a loss ... On the Rotary Lombardi Award watch list.

AMERICAN ATHLETIC CONFERENCE

	EAST		OVERALL	
	W	L	W	L
Temple	2	0	5	0
UConn	1	1	3	3
East Carolina	1	1	3	3
USF	0	1	2	3
Cincinnati	0	2	3	2
UCF	0	2	0	6

	WEST		OVERALL	
	W	L	W	L
Houston	2	0	5	0
Memphis	2	0	5	0
Navy	2	0	4	1
Tulane	1	1	2	3
Tulsa	0	1	3	2
SMU	0	2	1	5

TODAY'S GAMES

- » Cincinnati at Brigham Young, 7 p.m. (ESPN)
- » No. 24 Houston at Tulane, 8 p.m. (ESPNU)

SATURDAY'S GAMES

- » Tulsa at East Carolina, 11 a.m. (ESPNU/ESPNews)
- » USF at UConn, 11 a.m. (ESPNU/ESPNews)
- » No. 12 Mississippi at Memphis, 2:30 p.m. (ABC)
- » UCF at Temple, 6:30 p.m. (CBS Sports Network)

Editor's Pick: Game to Watch

No. 12 Ole Miss
at Memphis
2:30 p.m. Saturday
TV: ABC

Memphis has won 12 straight games and is 5-0 for the first time since 1961. A win over the Rebels in a nationally televised home game could send the Tigers skyrocketing into the AP Top 25.



Heisman Watch

» Houston junior quarterback **Greg Ward Jr.** is the only player nationally to average over 200 passing yards per game (260.4) and over 100 rushing yards per game (110.8).

» Ward leads The American and is sixth nationally with an average of 371.2 yards of total offense per game.

Courtesy photo
UH Athletics



Trending Up



Michigan

The Wolverines defense pitched its third consecutive shutout in a 38-0 rout of then-No. 13 Northwestern, the team's fifth straight win.

Trending Down



Southern California

First the Trojans lost at home to Washington. Now the team must move on after head coach Steve Sarkisian was fired earlier this week.