

Defense

2008 Big 12/NCAA Rankings

Rushing Defense – 4th/28th (123.08)

Passing Defense – 10th/114th (273.62)

Pass Efficiency Defense – 3rd/69th (125.69)

Total Defense – 7th/89th (396.69)

Scoring Defense – 7th/82nd (28.85)

Lettermen Returning – 21

Lettermen Lost – 9

Starters Returning – 7

Starters Lost – 4

The biggest question on the defensive side of the ball will be how to replace all three starting linebackers from last year. The trio of James Holt (2008 All-Big 12 Second Team), Joe Mortensen (2007 All-Big 12 Second Team) and Mike Rivera (three-time All-Big 12 Honorable Mention) started a combined 103 games and recorded 821 tackles during their All-Big 12 recognized careers. In addition, all three led the Jayhawks in tackles during one of their seasons in Lawrence. However, seven starters do return to a unit which ranked fourth in the league in rushing defense and third in pass efficiency defense. Among the returnees are All-Big 12 First Team selection Darrell Stuckey. The safety had a tremendous junior season registering 98 tackles, while picking off five passes and breaking up seven. His leadership was invaluable a year ago as the Jayhawks revamped their secondary in the last half of the year.

Among the returnees in the defensive backfield are cornerbacks Justin Thornton and Daymond Patterson. Thornton started the first half of the year at free safety before moving outside, while Patterson was a wide receiver, who started two games offensively during the first part of the year, before starting at corner for the last five games.

Phillip Strozier started the last half of the season at free safety, while Chris Harris, a starter at corner for a year a half, was the nickel back for the final half of the year.

The front line is paced by defensive tackle Caleb Blakesley and defensive end Jake Laptad, who both earned All-Big 12 Honorable Mention accolades last season. Jamal Greene and Richard Johnson both started games in 2008, while Max Onyegbule was a major contributor.