

# The Future is Football

How Josh Heupel is Rebuilding Tennessee Football and Why Vol Nation Should be Excited

KNOXVILLE, Tenn., March 29, 2022 - After what felt like years of disappointment and turmoil for the Tennessee Volunteers football team, there is finally a light at the end of the tunnel. That light is head coach Josh Heupel.

In the past five years, the football program has seen three different head coaches and one interim coach; each making a name- whether good or bad- for themselves at the university.

After the 2020 recruiting scandal under head coach Jeremy Pruitt, which resulted in over \$1 million in legal fees, many Vols fans had begun to lose hope in the program. This all seemed to change, however, when UT hired athletic director Danny White and head coach Josh Heupel. Heupel's first season was promising for Vols fans as he began to transform the program and rebuild UT's image.

Heupel's debut season landed the Volunteers 7-6, with a devastating bowl game loss to Purdue. However, Heupel and the team remained positive and proud of their performance, and coach Heupel touched on the team's overall growth. He said, "But man, the journey has been unbelievable. When we took over the program 11 months ago, where it was and where it is today, two completely different (programs). Proud of these guys. They've come so far."



Heupel & Alontae Taylor celebrate win over Kentucky

With the first week of spring football wrapping up, Heupel's team is already looking promising as they get ready for the September 3 season kickoff.

*The Heup around the '22 recruiting class*



This is coach Heupel's second recruiting class and first full recruiting class on Rocky Top. Ranked number 17 nationally, Heupel's class features 13 early enrollees, one of which is four-star quarterback Tayven Jackson. With 13 of the 21 recruits already on campus, Heupel is able to operate spring practice with an almost complete team.

The 2022 class features some of the nation's most highly sought out players, including four-star recruits Tayven Jackson, Addison Nichols and Tyre West. All three players are early enrollees and have already completed a week of spring practice with the Volunteers.

The new roster manages to fill the holes left by last season's seniors and includes a variety of flexible positions coach Heupel can utilize. The Vols' greatest losses were on the defensive line and in the secondary. The new recruits account for three defensive backs and three defensive linemen. Where Heupel needed positions filled, he got more than he could have imagined.

Heupel first recruited players that filled the obvious spots. He then strategically managed to build a roster flexible enough to offset where certain positions were lacking. This excites the Vol nation as the season will start with a full roster.

### ***Believe the Heup***

While there is a lot to be said for the future of coach Heupel's team, a lot has already been done to reestablish the excitement around the football program as a whole.

Pruitt and the Vols ended the 2020 season 3-7, making for one of the worst records the team has held in years. Heupel quickly showed up and showed out with a 7-6 record and bowl game appearance to kick-start his career in Knoxville. But that's not the only record accounted for in the 2021 season.

The '21 season brought back the excitement of Tennessee football and reestablished the atmosphere within Neyland Stadium that makes the UT fanbase one of the best in the nation. There were some major moments that fans are still talking about today.

First, Heupel debuted the "dark mode" alternate uniform ahead of the South Carolina game. The game ended with a 45-20 win for the Vols. Shortly after the UofSC weekend, Heupel, alongside the Tennessee athletics department, agreed to bring back the legendary #CheckerNeyland. The game, against Ole Miss, was the first sold out Tennessee football game since 2017. A full



stadium only means that Vol Nation set a Neyland stadium record with an ear-splitting 118

decibels. Decibels are the unit used for measuring the relative loudness of sounds. Loud noise over 120 dB can cause immediate harm to your ears.



Neyland Stadium during the Ole Miss game

The Vols traveled to Tuscaloosa to play Alabama where Heupel’s team led the Crimson Tide up through the first half. The game racked up 4.7 million viewers, making it the most viewed college football game of the season.

To prove that the Heupel era is in full throttle, it only makes sense for the Steve Spurrier First-Year Head Coach of the Year Award to be given to Heupel himself. In January, Heupel was named the 2021 co-winner alongside South Carolina’s Shane Beamer.

### *A rocky way to the top*

You don’t become the number one college football team overnight, or even over the course of a single season for that matter. However, there is reason to believe that coach Heupel is on the right path to get there.

As the program continues to rebuild, it is important for us as dedicated fans, students and alumni to recognize the work Heupel has done, and the future success he is already building.

The new era of Tennessee football is just getting started, so it’s time to believe the Heup.

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