HOUSTON COUGARS

Big 12 Conference

HOUSTON BIO

National Championships - **0**

XO XO

Big 12 Championships: **0**

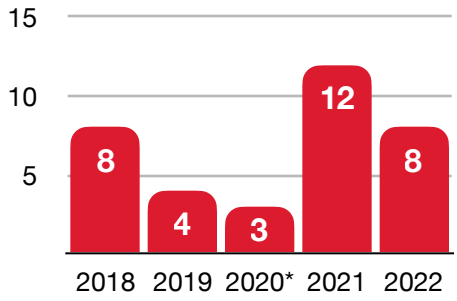
Location: **Houston, TX**

All-Time Record: **456-366-15**

2022 Results: **8-5**
Won Independence Bowl

Head Coach: **Dana Holgorsen**
4th Year (27-20)

5-YEAR WIN TREND



TDECU Stadium (40,000)

Can Houston Solve the Problem of the Defense?

Dana Holgorsen struggled in his first two seasons as head coach of Houston before a very impressive 12-2 campaign in 2021 that was largely overlooked due to Cincinnati's magical run to the College Football Playoff. The defense that created havoc and nicknamed "sack avenue" returned only six starters in 2022 and the inexperience showed. The Cougars went from allowing just 20.4 points per game in 2021 to 32.2 last season. A wild shootout against SMU (a 63-77 loss) showcased the defensive struggles and the secondary was torn apart all season. Holgorsen guides his team into the Big 12 where he was a head coach with West Virginia from 2011-2018. His immediate concern will be improving that defense as the Cougars prepare for the challenge of a Big 12 schedule. Not only do the Cougars jump up to the "Power 5", but they also play seven in-state opponents including UTSA and Rice out of the non-conference. This season will provide a clear indication of where Houston ranks amongst the many FBS Texas teams.

Holgorsen's offense caught fire the past two seasons thanks in large part to talented quarterback Clayton Tune who finishes his Houston career with 11,991 career passing yards (third all-time in school history). Tank Dell was Tune's favorite target last season and was one of the best receivers in the country (and an All-American), amassing 109 catches for 1,398 yards and 17 touchdowns. Replacing both Tune and Dell is a daunting task and Houston will need several options to emerge as the Cougars will try to make up for their production by committee. Tune threw every single pass for Houston last season besides the three that were all completed by **Lucas Coley**. He'll likely sit in the backup role once again, however, due to incoming transfer **Donovan Smith** from Texas Tech. Smith has just over 2,500 yards, 19 touchdowns, and 10 interceptions over the past two seasons where he was the starter for the better part of both years. He doesn't run the ball a ton but is capable with his legs and is specifically dangerous in the red zone where he uses his 6'5", 241 pound frame to push the ball in the end zone. He's familiar with the Big 12 which should only help.

There are several young but talented receivers on the roster. **Matthew Golden** caught 38 passes for 584 yards and 7 touchdowns as a true freshman. **Samuel Brown** was technically a freshman last year in terms of eligibility and added 41 catches for 471 yards in his first season with the Cougars after spending the first two mostly on the bench in West Virginia. He's not the only Mountaineer transfer who could make a difference. Tight end **Mike O'Laughlin** and running back **Tony Mathis** are potential starters who travel here from Morgantown. **Mikal Harrison-Pilot** and **Jonah Wilson** are two four-star recruits ranked at the top of Houston's class (via 24/7 Sports) and could make an impact in the passing game on day one. In addition to Mathis, the Cougars bring back their two best running backs from last season, **Stacy Sneed** (501 yards) and **Brandon Campbell** (435 yards). Tune led the way with 544 yards on the ground and with his departure, expect more carries for the running backs even with Smith's running ability. The offensive line led by starting tackle **Patrick Paul** should be capable.

The defense is the biggest concern on the team especially in the secondary. The unit as a whole is relatively inexperienced outside of **Malik Fleming** who transfers from East Carolina with 31 starts under his belt. "Sack Avenue" wasn't quite the same last season and those that were effective in the pass rush (Atlias Bell, D'Anthony Jones, and Derek Parish) depart and the Cougars must replace their 16.5 combined sacks of the team's 31. Defensive ends **Nelson Ceaser** and **David Ugwoegbu** will need to lead the way and **Chidozie Nwankwo** was All-AAC last year at defensive tackle. There isn't necessarily a "standout player" at linebacker but it's a group with two returning starters and decent depth.

The Bottom Line: It's difficult to see Houston as a contender in the Big 12 this season with a defense that allowed 32.2 points per game in the American. The Cougars played two Big 12 opponents last season and lost both games (Texas Tech and Kansas). I fully expect Houston to find their footing eventually but they could take their lumps in 2023 and they draw most of the big contenders in the Big 12 on this year's schedule.

Projection: 4-8 (14th in Big 12)

2022 Statistics

Points Scored	Rush Yards	Pass Yards	Turnover Margin
36.1	141.8	314.0	-5
16th in FBS	78th in FBS	8th in FBS	T-101st in FBS

Points Allowed	Rush YDS Allowed	Pass YDS Allowed
32.2	143.2	278.6
112th in FBS	56th in FBS	122nd in FBS

2023 Houston Schedule

Week	Date	Team
1	Sat, Sept 2	vs. UTSA
2	Sat, Sept 9	@ Rice
3	Sat, Sept 16	**vs. TCU**
4	Sat, Sept 23	vs. Sam Houston
5	Sat, Sept 30	**@ Texas Tech**
6	Bye Week	
7	Thu, Oct 12	**vs. West Virginia**
8	Sat, Oct 21	**vs. Texas**
9	Sat, Oct 28	**@ Kansas State**
10	Sat, Nov 4	**@ Baylor**
11	Sat, Nov 11	**vs. Cincinnati**
12	Sat, Nov 18	**vs. Oklahoma St.**
13	Sat, Nov 25	**@ UCF**

Conference Games in Bold

KEY GAMES

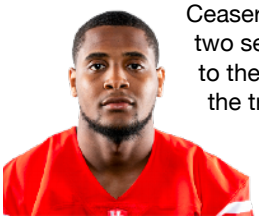
Sat, Sept 2: vs. UTSA - Both the Cougars and Roadrunners moved conferences this season. Last year Houston needed three overtimes to finally put away a UTSA team that has American conference championship hopes this season.

Sat, Sept 16: vs. TCU - Houston kicks off their first ever Big 12 game by welcoming in last year's runner-up in college football. This is the first meeting between the two programs since the 2007 Texas Bowl.

Sat, Sat, 30: @ Texas Tech - The former Southwest Conference rivals are now matched up in the same conference for the first time since 1995. The Red Raiders have claimed 10 of the last 11 dating back to 1991.

KEY PLAYERS

Nelson Ceaser - DE



Ceaser has accumulated 7.5 sacks over the past two seasons and he added a couple of big plays to the 2022 campaign. He intercepted a pass in the triple overtime thriller against UTSA and forced a fumble in a narrow loss to Tulane. With much of the pass rush gone from last season, Houston will be relying on Ceaser heavily to be a disrupter.

David Ugwoegbu - DE

Ugwoegbu had a breakout season for the Oklahoma Sooners in 2022, registering 109 tackles and a pair of sacks. Now at Houston, he will likely be utilized on the defensive line as opposed to the middle linebacker position he occupied with the Sooners. After reaching out to the NFL to check about his potential draft status, Ugwoegbu returns home and the Katy, Texas native will have a great opportunity to showcase his talent with the Cougars. 51 career games played in the Big 12 should only help.

2022 RESULTS (9-4)

@ UTSA (W 37-35)
@ Texas Tech (L 30-33)
Kansas (L 30-48)
Rice (W 34-27)
Tulane (L 24-27)
@ Memphis (W 33-32)
@ Navy (W 38-20)
South Florida (W 42-27)
@ SMU (L 63-77)
Temple (W 43-36)
@ East Carolina (W 42-3)
Tulsa (L 30-37)
Louisiana (W 23-16)

HOUSTON

RECRUITING

2023 Class Ranking

56th

(Via 24/7 Sports)