NORTH TEXAS MEAN GREEN

2023 Record: 5-7   American Athletic Conference   Denton, TX

FBS Ranking

90

GABE BLAIR – G
Photo via Beaumont Enterprise

2024 UNT Schedule

Wk		
1	Sat, Aug 31	@ South Alabama
2	Sat, Sept 7	vs. SFA
3	Sat, Sept 14	@ Texas Tech
4	Sat, Sept 21	vs. Wyoming
5	Sat, Sept 28	vs. Tulsa
7	Sat, Oct 12	@ Florida Atlantic
8	Sat, Oct 19	@ Memphis
9	Sat, Oct 26	vs. Tulane
11	Sat, Nov 9	vs. Army
12	Fri, Nov 15	@ UTSA
13	Sat, Nov 23	vs. East Carolina
14	Sat, Nov 30	@ Temple

■ **Home**   ■ **Away**

Key Games

@ Texas Tech: The all-time series is tied four apiece but the last meeting happened in 2001. Eric Morris returns to Texas Tech where he not only coached as an offensive coordinator but played wide receiver from 2004 to 2008.

@ Florida Atlantic: The Owls and Mean Green are familiar with one another from their days in Conference USA but this marks the first American meeting. A key game for UNT if they have plans of disrupting the conference race.

@ UTSA: This rivalry is one of the most underrated rivalries in the sport. The Roadrunner have the series lead at 7-5 but the majority of the games have been highly competitive.

There was a time (somewhat recently) where reaching a bowl game was a massive achievement for North Texas. Seth Latrell changed that starting in his first season in Denton in 2016. His tenure lasted seven seasons and he guided the Mean Green to a bowl game in all but one season. His teams weren't able to win any of those bowl games, but it's hard to ignore the fact that his elevation of the program may have helped North Texas take the step into the American.

Last season the Mean Green saw a three-year bowl streak slip through their fingers. Of the seven losses, four of them were in single-possession games. What will it take to return to a bowl in head coach Eric Morris' second season? At risk of oversimplification, there's an obvious remedy: improve the defense. The Mean Green were routinely gashed and gave up the most yards of any team in the country. The poor performance of the defense overshadowed a very potent offense that ended the season with the sixth-most yards in the country.

OFFENSE

Chandler Rogers might have been the most under-appreciated quarterback in college football last season, at least from a national perspective. Certainly, opposing defenses appreciated (and probably bemoaned) his talent when he threw for 29 touchdowns and only 5 interceptions to the tune of 3,382 yards. He has since transferred to California, so Morris brought in his own transfer quarterback named Chandler in TCU's **Chandler Morris**. He played fairly well for the Horned Frogs before losing his job following an injury. He's one of the most talented options in the conference and the transition should be plug and play. He's a capable runner much like Rogers was. **Stone Earle** attempted 40 passes and threw 4 touchdowns and 4 interceptions and returns as the assumed backup.

While the passing numbers are gaudy, North Texas has been just as effective running the ball. Last year, despite **Ikaika Ragsdale** missing almost the entire 2023 season after posing 755 yards in 2022, the Mean Green still had a go-to running back.Ayo Adeyi rushed for 1,757 yards and 10 touchdowns over the past two years and he transferred to James Madison this offseason. Ragsdale is back and North Texas also adds **Zach Evans** from Minnesota and **Juwaun Price** from Syracuse so despite the loss of a 1,000 yard back last season there shouldn't be too much of a drop off. The offensive line could be better with **Gabe Blair** highlighting the group at guard. **Jett Duncan** has started 26 games and a handful of transfers dot this group so depth could work in North Texas' favor in 2024.

The receiving corps takes a hit with Ja'Morir Maclin's departure to Kentucky after a 1,000 yard season but **Damon Ward** is back and **Blair Conwright** added 385 yards and two touchdowns. This group has more to prove than the 2023 unit, but that doesn't mean they can't be effective.

DEFENSE

There were immediate warning signs from the defense on the opening week of the season. California blitzed the Mean Green 58-21. Sure, the Golden Bears were a "Power Five" school but giving up 679 yards in a single game to anybody is worrisome. The improvement starts by being better against the run. Nobody allowed more rushing yards (255.2) than North Texas last season. There are several returners up front and Eric Morris and second year DC Matt Caponi have supplemented the unit with a number of Power 4 transfers. The defense underperformed so much that some might consider returning experience as a bad thing, but there's really nowhere to go but up and there should be familiarity with Caponi's system in year two.
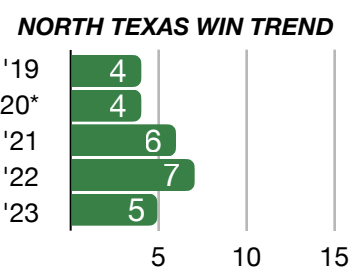
Two of the top three tacklers return with linebackers **Ethan Wesloski** and **Jordan Brown**. Brown was fourth-team all-AAC with team bests in tackles (83) and sacks (3.5) and Wesloski was productive as a true freshman starter. The linebacker duo joins **Roderick Brown** and **Fatafehi Vailea** in the front seven. That group was punished by run games all season and only netted 18 sacks. However, the slate is wiped clean in 2024 and the added experience and transfers such as **Jake Shipley** and **Terrell Dawkins** adds both depth and legitimate size.

The secondary will have two familiar faces at cornerback: **Ridge Texada** and **Lorenzo Thompson**. The starting safeties will probably both end up being members of this strong transfer portal class including **Jayden Hill**.

> Can Mean Green defense catch up with the high powered offense?

HC: Eric Morris
(2nd Year, 5-7)

OC: Jordan Davis
(2nd Year)

DC: Matt Caponi
(2nd Year)

2024 Class Rankings

Recruiting
69

Transfer Portal
71

Via 24/7 Sports

NORTH TEXAS WIN TREND

Year	Wins
'19	4
'20*	4
'21	6
'22	7
'23	5

(scale: 5, 10, 15)

2023 Results (5-7)

California (L 21-58)
@ FIU (L 39-46)
@ Louisiana Tech (W 40-37)
Abilene Christian (W 45-31)
@ Navy (L 24-27)
Temple (W 45-14)
@ Tulane (L 28-35)
Memphis (L 42-45)
UTSA (L 29-37)
@ SMU (L 21-45)
@ Tulsa (W 35-28)
UAB (W 45-42)

NORTH TEXAS

IKAIKA RAGSDALE – RB

Ragsdale rushed for 511 yards as a freshman and added 661 more as a sophomore. His junior season didn't go according to plan and he was knocked out for the season with an injury after just nine carries. Star running back Ayo Adeyi is gone which means Ragsdale will have the opportunity to tote the rock a lot more in 2024 and if healthy, he may post career best numbers and he'll figure into the passing game, too.

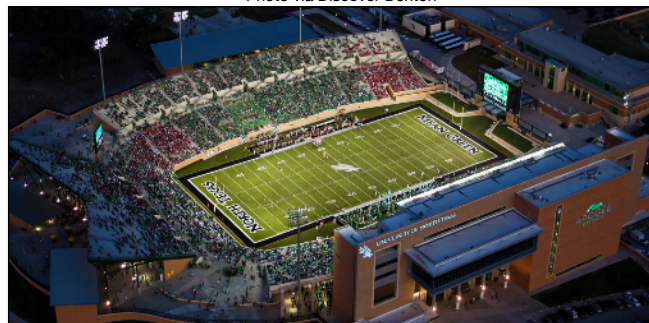**2023 Stats: 9 RUSH, 34 YDS, 0 TD**

JORDAN BROWN – LB

Not a lot went right for the defense in 2023 but if there's a catalyst to help jumpstart the rebuild on that side of the ball, it's Brown. He paved the way with 83 tackles and 3.5 sacks which were both significant jumps from any of his prior three seasons. The seasoned veteran is the face of Matt Caponi's 3-3-5 scheme and the leader of the linebacker room that should be much more talented as a whole in 2024.

2023 Stats: 83 TKL, 5 TFL, 3.5 SACK

Damon WARD

Apogee Stadium (30,850)

Appointment Television

North Texas **vs.** Texas Tech

Sat, Sept 14 - 12:00 PM ET FS1

North Texas has an early opportunity to stun a Big 12 opponent in Texas Tech. Perhaps the Mean Green can take some confidence that the Red Raiders found themselves on the wrong end of an upset in Laramie, Wyoming last season (who, ironically, is on the 2024 UNT schedule). With SMU departing to the American, Texas Tech represents one of only two FBS teams the Mean Green will face from the state of Texas (UTSA).

SPECIAL TEAMS

Blake Ford will likely get the place kicking nod in 2024. He took a couple kickoffs for Arkansas last season, but that's it. **Sawyer Evans** had a solid year punting although he was only called upon 30 times.

THE BOTTOM LINE

There's no question that the defense held North Texas back in many ways last season but the good news is that, unlike 2023, they don't have to replace the school's all-time leading tackler and Conference USA Defensive Player of the Year. There are several transfers that will plug into the starting lineup immediately and if everything goes to plan, that side of the ball will be much better. Heck, even if the defense is average by FBS standards North Texas will see their win total rise. Can the Mean Green pull off that kind of rapid improvement?

If you like high-powered offenses, North Texas is the team for you. The offensive attack should be balanced again and will give North Texas an opportunity to at least compete in every game this season. The non-conference schedule is manageable even with a trip to Lubbock. October's three games against Florida Atlantic, Memphis, and Tulane should paint a clear picture of how competitive North Texas will really be in the American. If the Mean Green truly have their sights set on a conference title, they'll need to post a road record above .500 for the first time since 2018.

2023 Statistics

Offense			Defense		
Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank	Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank
Points	34.5	21	**Points**	37.1	128
Rushing	191.2	21	**Rushing**	255.2	130
Passing	304.7	12	**Passing**	221.3	63
Total	495.8	6	**Total**	476.4	130
Sacks	38	T-111	**Sacks**	18	T-114

2024 Projection
6-6
6th in AAC

Trophy Case

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