Quarterback

Senior Brandon Bridge is firmly entrenched in the starting position, according to head coach Joey Jones. It’s Bridge’s backup that is the question for the Jaguars. Coach Jones talked about the pressing need to establish a backup quarterback, and juniors Matt Floyd and Trey Fetner, as well as sophomore Hunter Vaughn, are all vying for that spot. Bridge played in nine games last year, completing 29-of-66 passes for 398 yards and 1 touchdown, and added 170 yards and a touchdown on the ground.

Running Back

Running back is an important position for the Jaguars. The Jags went 5-2 when outrushing their opponents last year, as opposed to 1-4 when being outrushed. Senior Jay Jones returns as South Alabama’s top rusher, with Kendall Houston serving as the change-of-pace power back at 5-10, 230 pounds. Terrance Timmons will be the third string back.

Wide Receiver

The Jaguars return their top three receivers from last year in Shavarez Smith, Danny Woodson II and Jeremé Jones. Smith, a second-team All-Sun Belt Conference selection in 2013, led the Jags last season with 50 catches for 940 yards and 6 touchdowns. Look for former University of Alabama receiver Marvin Shinn to contribute as well. The coaches raved about Shinn’s ability to catch the ball in traffic this fall, and his big 6-2 frame could greatly benefit Brandon Bridge in third down situations.

Tight End

Returning starter Wes Saxton received first-team All-Sun Belt honors last season, and comes into 2014 as a preseason first-team all-conference selection. Saxton tied Smith for the team lead last year with 50 receptions, good for 635 yards. Junior college-transfer Braedon Bowman and senior Rush Hendricks will back up Saxton.

Offensive Line

Offensive line is perhaps South Alabama’s greatest strength for the 2014 season. Right tackle Chris May earned first-team All-Sun Belt accolades last year, and left tackle Ucambre Williams was named to the second team. Both players were named to the preseason all-conference first team. At right guard, Melvin Meggs returns after missing the entire 2013 season with an injury. Meggs started all 13 games as a sophomore in 2012. Drew Dearman enters his senior season as the starter at left guard with 18 career starts under his belt. Sophomore Joseph Scelfo will start at center after playing in 10 games last season for the Jaguars.

Defensive Line

Seniors Jesse Kelley and Jerome McClain will anchor the interior of the Jaguars’ defensive line this year. Kelley was a preseason second-team all-conference selection after posting 6.5 tackles for loss and 2 sacks last year. McClain put up similar numbers last season as well, with 4.5 TFL and 3 sacks. Theo Rich will start at defensive end, with JUCO-transfer Jimmie Gipson III starting at the “Jack” position.

Linebackers

Senior Maleki Harris, who will start on the strong side of the defense, leads the Jaguars’ linebackers for 2014. Harris started 10 games for the Jags last year, and will be one of the leaders of this year’s defense. Another preseason All-Sun Belt pick for South Alabama, Harris earned second-team honors after posting 63 tackles with 8.5 being for a loss. Desmond LaVelle is listed as the starter at middle linebacker, and brings size to the middle of the defense at 5-11, 230 pounds. Senior Davin Hawkins will back up LaVelle, with Junior Andrew Philon serving as Harris’ backup. Philon was named the most improved linebacker by South Alabama coaches following spring practice.

Secondary

South Alabama runs a 4-2-5 defensive scheme, meaning their base defense employs five defensive backs, as opposed to the traditional four. Cornerbacks Qudarius Ford and Montell Garner will start for the Jaguars, as well as Antonio Carter at the nickel back position. Terrell Brigham has started 24 straight games at free safety for the Jags, and will hold that role once more for his senior season. Roman Buchanan rounds out the defensive back group at strong safety.

Special Teams

Aleem Sunanon hit 18-of-23 field goals and 37-of-39 extra-point attempts last season as a redshirt freshman, including a school-record 12 straight over his last seven games, and will handle the place kicking duties again this fall. Sophomore Brandon McKee is slated to be the primary punter for the Jags this year. Back up receivers Josh Magee and T.J. Glover will handle kickoff returns and punt returns, respectively.