

ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

ATHLETICS

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WONDER BOYS FOOTBALL CONTINUES PUSH TOWARD NCAA PLAYOFF BERTH BY HOSTING DELTA STATE FOR SENIOR NIGHT

RUSSELLVILLE, Arkansas – Arkansas Tech Football is set to continue on its push towards earning a berth in the 2009 NCAA Division II Playoffs when they conclude the regular season home portion of its schedule on Saturday against Delta State in an important Gulf South Conference match-up. Kickoff for Saturday's Senior Night game is slated for 6 p.m. in Thone Stadium at Buerkle Field.

Prior to the beginning of Saturday's game, the Wonder Boys will honor its 22-member senior class in a pregame ceremony. The seniors this season are: defensive lineman **Norman Bell** (Minneapolis, Minn.), running back **Tim Childress** (Batesville, Ark.), defensive lineman **Jason Claborn** (St. Rose, La.), fullback **Justice Clinton** (Sheridan, Ark.), kicker/punter **Travis Cockerham** (Bryant, Ark.), defensive back **Delvin Ellis** (Memphis, Tenn.), quarterback **Nick Graziano** (Moraga, Calif.), defensive back **Adrian Holiday** (West Helena, Ark.), linebacker **Matt Kitchens** (Russellville, Ark.), defensive back **Lenald Mombo** (Chicago, Ill.), fullback **Tyler Morton** (Hot Springs, Ark.), linebacker **Nick Pate** (Mena, Ark.), offensive lineman **Ted Reed** (Yorba Linda, Calif.), defensive back **DeAuntra Rideau** (Del City, Okla.), defensive lineman **Matt Riser** (Jacksonville, Ark.), receiver **Frantz Simeon** (Belle Glade, Fla.), defensive back **Marcus Stiger** (Russellville, Ark.), linebacker **Brandon Tribble** (Valley Springs, Calif.), receiver **Landon Turner** (Destrehan, La.), offensive lineman **Chris Warden** (Ozark, Ark.), receiver **Rolaundo Wright** (Sulphur Springs, Texas) and center **Torrence Wright** (Sulphur Springs, Texas).

"This is a very special group of young men," Tech Head Football Coach and Athletic Director **Steve Mullins** said. "Their bond and chemistry is strong and have been a part of a lot of successes while at Tech."

Tech enters Saturday's game with Delta State currently sitting in eighth in the latest NCAA D-II Super Regional Two Poll and is sporting a 6-2 overall record and a 4-2 mark in the league after collecting a 44-14 win last Saturday at Henderson State. The win over the Reddies was Tech's third straight since suffering a 42-17 win at current top-ranked North Alabama on Oct. 3. The top six teams in the final NCAA D-II Super Regional Two poll will receive playoff bids.

"As we go into Saturday's game, I think our players have a lot of confidence," Mullins said. "We have a great opponent coming in here on Saturday and it is a big, big game as we push to get into the NCAA Playoffs. We need everyone to come out to the game and create a big home field advantage."

Saturday's opponent, Delta State, who is the two-time defending GSC Champions, have had an up-and-down season by their recent standards as the Statesmen are sporting a 4-4 overall record and a 3-3 mark in the league. Since opening GSC play with an impressive win over Harding, DSU has won just two

(Valdosta State and Southern Arkansas) of its last five league games, but held a 24-21 lead going into the fourth quarter of its game at North Alabama two weeks ago, before falling 34-24 in the "GSC-TV Live" Game of the Week.

Prior to this season, Delta State had gone undefeated in GSC play in both 2007 and 2008. In fact, DSU had won 23 straight conference games dating to the 2006 season when the Statesmen fell 38-14 at then 21st-ranked Ouachita Baptist on Sept. 26.

"DSU is an older, experienced team with so much success, so it is crucial for us to get off to a good start," the 13th-year Tech coach said. "They (DSU) will be a tremendous challenge for our team."

On offense, the Statesmen are fifth in the league in total offense (399.5 yards/game) and are fourth in the league in rushing (153.4 yards/game) and seventh in scoring (25.0 points/game). Leading the way for DSU's offense is running back/receiver Trevar Deed. Deed is third in the league in rushing (79.3 yards/game), third in pass receptions (7.4 per game) and second in all-purpose yards (168.8 yards/game). On the season, Deed has carried the ball 113 times for 634 yards and has scored seven rushing touchdowns and he has also caught 59 passes for 653 yards and has three touchdown receptions.

"They put the ball in his hands a lot and move him (Deed) all over the field," Mullins said. "It is amazing watching him (Deed) operate. He is a big-play guy and we'll need to contain him."

In addition to Deed, quarterback Garrett DeWitt is fifth in the league in both passing yards (239.8 yards/game) and total offense (247.6 yards/game). DeWitt is 178-for-289 passing for 1,918 yards and he has thrown 11 touchdowns and 11 interceptions.

One problem for DSU's offense is its propensity to turn the ball over, especially inside the red zone, as the Statesmen have thrown 12 interceptions and have lost seven fumbles this season. DSU has been inside the red zone 31 times and has scored on just 20 of those trips as they have thrown four interceptions, had three fumbles and have missed three field goals.

Meanwhile, on defense, the Statesmen feature perhaps the most dominant player in the league in linebacker Lardester Hicks-Green. Hicks-Green, who was the 2008 GSC Defensive Player of the Year and was also named the GSC Defensive Player of the Week this past Monday, enters Saturday's game having recorded 329 career tackles and is just six tackles shy of setting a new DSU record for career tackles. On the season, Hicks-Green has recorded 81 total tackles, 12.5 tackles for loss and three quarterback sacks and has had four games with double-digit tackles, including a school record 20 stops against Valdosta State.

"We need to be aware of where he (Hicks-Green) is at on the field," the Tech coach added. "He is very intense and plays hard."

While DSU enters the game with the league's No. 3 ranked defense and No. 5 ranked defense, Tech enters Saturday's game ranked first in the league in passing (367.4 yards/game), total offense (510.9 yards/game) and passing efficiency (155.3). In addition, the Wonder Boys are third nationally in total offense, passing and scoring (41.6 points/game). On season, Tech's offense has gained 350 or more yards in all eight games, including picking gaining 500 or more yards in five games.

Leading the way for Tech's high-powered offense is Graziano. Graziano, who earned his third GSC Offensive Player of the Week this past Monday after his school record 456 yard passing game against the Reddies, leads the GSC in passing (333.2

yards/game), total offense (357.4 yards) and passing efficiency (155.4) and has had three 400-plus yard passing games this season. In addition, Graziano is third nationally in passing yards and fourth nationally in total offense. Along with Graziano, other top offensive performers are Turner and Simeon. Turner leads the GSC and is fifth nationally in receiving yards (105.7 yards/game), while Simeon, who is coming off a school record 14 reception, 229 yard game against HSU last Saturday, is second in the league and sixth nationally in receiving yards (104.8 yards/game), leads the GSC and is second nationally in all-purpose yards (203.9 yards/game) and leads the league in scoring (9.0 points/game) as he has scored 12 touchdowns in eight games this season.

"Our offense continues to perform well and a lot of that is due to Nick's ability to operate under center," said Mullins, who is one victory shy of becoming the third all-time winningest coach in GSC history. Mullins has had 81 career coaching wins at Tech and that puts him tied for third with former UNA coach Wayne Grubb (1977-87) on the league's all-time victory list.

Saturday's meeting with Delta State marks the 17th meeting all-time in the series with the Statesmen holding an 10-6 lead. Tech has lost four straight games in the series since posting a 35-29 win in 2004. Last season, the Statesmen collected a 48-14 win in Cleveland. The series is tied 4-4 in Russellville, while DSU leads 6-2 in Cleveland. Saturday's meeting in Russellville will be the first in the series since 2006 when DSU picked up a 31-13 win at Cyclone Stadium.

Following Saturday's game, Tech will close out the 2009 regular season on Saturday, Nov. 7, at Harding. Kickoff is set for 2 p.m. in First Security Stadium in Searcy, Ark.

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