

# ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

**ATHLETICS**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 21, 2009**

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## **WONDER BOYS SET TO BEGIN STRETCH RUN OF SEASON SATURDAY AT HENDERSON STATE**

**RUSSELLVILLE, Arkansas** – Arkansas Tech Football is set to return to road Saturday to begin its final push towards a berth in the 2009 NCAA Division II Playoffs as the Wonder Boys face off against Henderson State in a 3 p.m. Gulf South Conference tilt in Carpenter-Haygood Stadium on the HSU campus.

Tech, who is ranked ninth in the latest NCAA Division II Super Regional Two Poll, is looking to earn a postseason berth for the third time in the last 10 years and the first time since advancing to the second round of the playoffs in 2004.

At the end of the regular season, the top six teams from Super Region Two will qualify for the playoffs.

"It makes it much more fun to go out to practice when you are playing for a tangible goal," Arkansas Tech Head Football Coach and Athletic Director **Steve Mullins** said. "We've still got some things out there, and as we strive to make the playoffs there are several other teams in our conference with two league losses. Everybody is still hungry as far as having something to play for.

"Each game from here on out is a playoff game, and we just hope that continues to build."

Saturday's game begins a tough stretch run for the Wonder Boys over the final weeks of the regular season as Tech returns home to conclude the home portion of regular season schedule next Saturday by hosting Delta State for Senior Day, before concluding the regular season on Nov. 7 at Harding.

The Wonder Boys enter Saturday's game sporting a 5-2 overall record and a 3-2 mark in the GSC following its 62-30 win last Saturday on homecoming over West Georgia. In addition, Tech has won two straight games since falling on the road at top-ranked North Alabama, 42-17.

In the win over UWG, Tech posted season highs in points (62), total offensive yards (637), passing yards (475), touchdown passes (7) and touchdowns scored (9). In addition, Tech saw senior receiver **Frantz Simeon** (Belle Glade, Fla.) catch 10 passes for a school record 216 yards and also set a new school record with four touchdown receptions and senior quarterback **Nick Graziano** (Moraga, Calif.) set a new school mark with 431 passing yards and also tied the single game school mark with six touchdown passes.

"Our offense played nearly flawless last weekend," Mullins said. "Our offensive coaches did a wonderful job preparing the offense and they went out and executed well."

While Tech was playing last Saturday, the Reddies, who are 3-4 overall and 3-2 in the GSC, haven't played since suffering a 33-20 loss at Valdosta State on Oct. 10. The loss to the Blazers snapped a three-game winning streak for the Reddies after opening the season dropping its first three games.

"Once again this season, it has been a year with quirks in the schedule. West Alabama had 10 days to prepare, as did West Georgia and now HSU has had two weeks to prepare," Mullins said. "As we go through our conference schedule, I wish it was a little more even, but what it is, is what it is."

Saturday's opponent, Henderson State, has undergone an offensive transformation during the year as they began the season running more of a spread offense, but the Reddies switched to more of a run-oriented attack following the departure of quarterback Roch Charpentier three games into the season. With that offensive transformation, the Reddies are now the top rushing team in the league as they average 193.7 rushing yards per game and have two of the top seven rushers in the conference.

Charpentier rewrote all of HSU's passing records in just 21 games before leaving school on Sept. 15.

"I give Coach (Scott) Maxfield a lot of credit for looking at his talent and changing his offense the way it needed to be changed," the 13th-year Tech coach said.

Leading the Reddies ground attack are juniors Stefon Ceaser and Kenard Springer. Ceaser is second in the league in rushing as he averages 81.1 yards per game and 8.0 yards per carry, while Springer is averaging 56.1 yards per game and has scored a team-best six touchdowns.

"Springer is a load. We're going to have to hit him and hang on," said Mullins, who has won 81 games in his tenure at Tech and is one win shy of tying former UNA coach Wayne Grubb for third place on the GSC all-time coaching wins list.

Tech's defense is second in the league at stopping the run as they are allowing foes to rush for 110 yards per game, including holding three opponents under 50 yards rushing this season.

HSU replaced Charpentier under center with two quarterbacks, junior Nick Hardesty and redshirt freshman Nathan Nall, who was a teammate of Tech redshirt freshman receiver **Roger Jackson** at Siloam Springs High School.

On defense, HSU will look to slow down Tech's high-powered offense that leads the GSC and is third nationally in both passing (354.3 yards/game) and total offense (505.1 yards/game) and is second in the league and sixth nationally in scoring at 41.3 points per game.

"HSU is very sound in their zone defense. They stick to fundamentals and stay where they are supposed to be and they also do a lot of twisting up front with its front four to create pressure and drop everyone back in coverage," Mullins said. "They are going to make you earn your way down the field."

Two of the keys for Tech on Saturday against Henderson State will be its ability to be patient on both sides of the ball and take care of the football. On the season, Tech enters the game with a +2.0 turnover margin, while HSU has a +4.0 turnover margin.

"In a tight game, 1 or 2 turnovers could be a factor," Mullins added.

Saturday's meeting with Henderson State marks the 83rd meeting all-time in the series that dates to 1920. Tech leads the all-time series 43-35-4 and has won nine of the last 12 games in the series. Last season, HSU picked up a 29-20 win over the Wonder Boys in Russellville on the "GSC-TV Live" Game of the Week.

Following Saturday's game, Tech will close the home regular season portion of its 2009 schedule by hosting Delta State in a 6 p.m. game in Thone Stadium at Buerkle Field. The game will mark the final home game for Tech's 21-member senior class and they will be honored in pregame festivities prior to kickoff.

**-- Tech Athletics --**