

ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

ATHLETICS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 7, 2009

Contact: Ben Greenberg, SID (479) 968-0645

WONDER BOYS FOOTBALL SET TO BEGIN TWO-GAME HOMESTAND SATURDAY AGAINST SOUTHERN ARKANSAS

RUSSELLVILLE, Arkansas – Arkansas Tech Football is set to return home to Thone Stadium at Buerkle Field to begin a two-game homestand as the Wonder Boys play host to Southern Arkansas in a 6 p.m. Gulf South Conference match-up.

Saturday's game is being billed as the NCAA's "Take a Kid to the Game Day" promotion as any child will receive free admission to the game with a paid adult admission.

Tech enters Saturday's game sporting a 3-2 overall record and a 1-2 mark in the GSC following its 42-17 loss last Saturday at third-ranked North Alabama, while SAU enters the contest with a 1-4 overall record and a 1-3 mark in the GSC after its 26-16 home loss last Saturday to Harding. The Muleriders have lost two straight games since earning its first win of the season on Sept. 17 in five overtimes at home against West Alabama.

"Every other goal we set at the beginning of the season is within reach, except winning a conference championship," Tech Head Football Coach and Athletic Director **Steve Mullins** said. "Our focus is on a winning season and making the NCAA Division II Playoffs and both of those goals are very attainable.

"Obviously, we have to win out and have some help along the way, but the playoffs are still a real possibility if we come together and don't let this loss affect us."

In last Saturday's loss to UNA, Tech was undone by five turnovers, including four interceptions by senior quarterback **Nick Graziano** (Moraga, Calif.). In the loss to the Lions, Tech's GSC-leading offense gained 452 yards, including passing for 279 yards. Prior to the UNA game, Tech forced four turnovers in its 59-14 home win on Sept. 26 over Arkansas-Monticello.

"We have to learn how to hold on to the football," Mullins said.

The Wonder Boys enter the week leading the GSC in both passing yards (339.6 yards/game) and total offense (500.4 yards/game), while they are third in the league in scoring (38.0 points/game) and fourth in rushing yards (160.8 yards/game). In addition, Tech is fourth nationally in both passing yards and total offense and is tied with BYU for third in all of NCAA Football on third down conversions as Tech has converted 60 percent (48-of-80) of its third down chances this season.

Despite four interceptions and 216 passing yards against UNA last weekend, Graziano still leads the GSC and is fifth nationally in total offense (326.8 yards/game) and is second in the league in passing (293.8 yards/game) and fourth in passing efficiency (140.9). On the season, Graziano is 111-for-186 passing for 1,469 yards and has thrown six interceptions and 12 touchdowns and has compiled 1,634 yards of total offense and has had a hand in 16 of Tech's 25 touchdowns. In addition to Graziano, senior receiver **Landon Turner** (Destrehan, La.) has caught a team-best 34

passes for 498 yards and is second in the GSC and 10th nationally in receiving yards (99.6 yards/game) and he has scored four touchdowns. He enters Saturday's game having caught a pass in 17 consecutive games dating to the second to last game of the 2007 season and he is now 10th on the school's career pass receiving yardage chart as he has caught 88 passes for 1,280 yards.

Saturday's opponent, Southern Arkansas, enters the weekend still looking to find an identity on offense as the Muleriders under first-year head coach Bill Keopple have switched from a triple-option attack that SAU has used the past several seasons to incorporating more of a spread look. Keopple came to Magnolia after spending the previous six seasons as the head coach at Texarkana [Ark.] High School.

On offense, SAU enters Saturday's game averaging 229.8 yards per game and rank last in the league in passing (128.4 yards/game), passing efficiency (75.2) and are 10th in the GSC in scoring as they average 17.4 points per game. Meanwhile, on defense, SAU is allowing foe to pass for 232.4 yards per game and rush for 172.4 yards per contest. In addition, they have recorded 48 tackles for loss, 13 quarterback sacks and have forced six fumbles and picked off four passes.

The architect of SAU's defense, **Jeff Byrd**, has moved on to Tech this season. During the offseason, Byrd was hired as the Wonder Boys defensive coordinator after spending four seasons as the Muleriders defensive coordinator.

Leading the way for SAU on defense is junior defensive tackle Cedric Thornton. Thornton has recorded 40 tackles and is second in the league in tackles for a loss (10.5) and is fourth in sacks with 3.5. Along with Thornton, senior linebacker Maurice Thornton has recorded 36 tackles and 2.0 tackles for a loss and senior defensive end Ryan Terry has had 32 total tackles, 6.5 tackles for a loss and three quarterback sacks.

"It usually takes one play on video tape to notice Cedric (Thornton). He is a phenomenal player," Mullins said. "In SAU's first game of the year against UNA, he really put on a show and brought a lot of pressure by himself. We are going to have find a way to slow him down. (Ryan) Terry is smaller, but every bit as fast and a very physical football player."

Mullins said that that one of the key for Saturday's game is his team's ability to be able to recover both mentally and physically from last weekend's North Alabama game.

"We have to get that game out of our system and be ready to play this weekend," the Tech coach added. "The players need to focus on what they can do to help us this week, as oppose to looking back to the last game."

Saturday's game marks the 73rd meeting all-time in the series between the two teams that dates to 1916. Tech leads the all-time series, 41-27-4, but Tech has lost the previous two games in the series, including suffering a 45-42 loss last season in Magnolia. Tech leads the series 20-11-3 in Russellville and leads 21-16-1 in Magnolia.

Following Saturday's game, Tech will conclude its homestand on Saturday, Oct. 17, when they welcome West Georgia to Thone Stadium at Buerkle Field for Homecoming 2009. Kickoff for the homecoming game is set for 6 p.m.

-- Tech Athletics --