

ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

ATHLETICS

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WONDER BOYS CLOSE OUT HOME SCHEDULE WITH IMPRESSIVE VICTORY OVER DELTA STATE ON SENIOR NIGHT

RUSSELLVILLE, Arkansas – Arkansas Tech Football used a record setting offensive performance by senior quarterback **Nick Graziano** to post an impressive 35-23 Gulf South Conference home victory over Delta State and keep its hopes alive for a berth in the 2009 NCAA Division II Playoffs on Senior Night in Thone Stadium at Buerkle Field.

With the win, Tech improves to 7-2 overall and 5-2 in the GSC and snaps a four-game losing skid to the Statesmen. In fact, Tech's last win over DSU came in the exact location of Saturday's victory as the Wonder Boys posted a 35-29 win in Russellville during the 2004 season, which is also the last time Tech qualified for the NCAA Division II Playoffs. In addition, the win extended Tech's winning streak to six straight at home dating to last season's finale against Harding.

"It was a wonderful way to celebrate Halloween and also Senior Night," Tech Head Coach **Steve Mullins** said. "I thought both our offense and defense played outstanding tonight, especially in the first half. DSU is a talented football team that has good football players and I was proud of the way we played."

Prior to kickoff of Saturday's game, Tech honored Graziano and the other 21 seniors in a pregame ceremony. The seniors on this year's team 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.), 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).

Graziano, the reigning GSC Offensive Player of the Week and the co-National Offensive Player of the Week from D2Football.com, gained a school record 546 yards of total offense as he passed for 350 yards and rushed 15 times for a career-high and Tech season-high 196 yards, including scoring on an 82-yard run in the fourth quarter to thwart a DSU comeback. The 545 yards of total offense is the most by a GSC quarterback this season and the sixth-best total in league history. In addition, Graziano, a native of Moraga, Calif., and a transfer from the University of Nevada, is the first GSC player to pass for 350 yards and run for 100-plus yards since Arkansas-Monticello signal

caller Scott Buisson rushed for 216 yards and threw for 424 yards enroute to setting a new GSC total offense mark of 640 yards last season against Henderson State.

"I thought our offensive coordinator Scott Preston did a good job calling those quarterback draw and zone read plays tonight with Graziano," Mullins said. "I also thought our offensive line, receivers and backs did a good job blocking, as well."

Tech took its opening possession and drove 90 yards in 11 plays and Childress completed the drive with a 3-yard touchdown run to give Tech a 7-0 lead after Cockerham's extra point with 9:12 left in the first quarter.

Childress increased Tech's lead to 14-0 following a 2-yard run with 10:50 left in the first half. Childress' run came 14 plays after Bell blocked a 26 yard field goal attempt by Matt Dean with 20 seconds left in the first quarter. Childress finished the night with 69 yards on the ground and he caught two passes for 26 yards.

Tech's lead grew to 21-0 with 13 seconds left in the first half following a 15-yard touchdown pass from Graziano to junior receiver **Scharvundrick Franklin** (Dumas, Ark.) to complete 12-play, 91-yard drive. The drive started after Tech stopped the Statesmen's Garrett DeWitt for no-gain on a fourth-and-three play at Tech's 9-yard line.

Rolaundo Wright gave Tech a 28-0 lead just a little under three minutes into the second half as he caught a 20-yard touchdown pass from Graziano. The touchdown pass was Graziano's 27th of the season, which sets a new Tech single-season mark for touchdown passes bettering the old mark of 26 set by Jason Campbell in 2004.

DSU, though, wouldn't go away as the Statesmen pulled within 28-7 following a 30-yard touchdown pass from DeWitt to Eldred King with 5:11 left in the third quarter. The Statesmen added another score a little less than two minutes later when Trevar Deed scored on a 5-yard run, which came one play after Xavier Rambo caught 40-yard pass from DeWitt.

The Statesmen took advantage of Tech's only turnover of the night on its next possession as Dean hit a 34-yard field goal with 1:06 left in the period to drop Tech's lead to 28-17. Dean's field goal came four plays after Byron Davenport returned an interception by Graziano 53 yards to Tech's 20-yard line. But, the Wonder Boys defense held firm as they limited DSU to just two yards before settling for the field goal.

"Holding them (DSU) to a field goal following that interception was a huge shift in momentum and seemed to stop the bleeding," said the 13th-year Tech coach, who moved into third place on the GSC's career win list with 83 career victories.

With about nine minutes remaining in the game, Graziano made perhaps the biggest play of the season as he outran DSU's defense and scored on that 82-yard run to give the Wonder Boys a 35-17 cushion. The 82-yard run is Tech's longest offensive play of the season and is tied for the ninth longest run from scrimmage in Tech history.

"Graziano's (82-yard) run gave us a little bit of cushion, but we have got to find a way to finish a game out," Mullins added.

Following Graziano's score, the Statesmen took its next possession and drove 76 yards in 12 plays and capped the drive with a 12-yard touchdown pass from DeWitt to Deed, but the two-point conversion attempt failed to give Tech a 35-23 lead with 4:30 left in the game.

Tech, though, recovered DSU's onside kickoff attempt and was able to run the final four-plus off the clock to pick up the win.

On the night, Graziano 27-for-54 passing for 350 yards and had two touchdown passes. With his 350 passing yards, Graziano passes Campbell (2,922 yards in 2004) as the school's single-season leader for passing yards (3,013 yards), while he also set a new single-season school mark for total offense (3,402 yards), which bettered Campbell's mark of 2,924, which was also set in 2004. Simeon finished the game with

six catches for 72 yards, while Turner caught six balls for 71 yards and moved into eighth place on the school's career pass receiving yardage chart with 1,593 yards as he moved past former Wonder Boy **John Westbrook** (1990-93), who had 1,540 career receiving yards.

Tech's offense finished the game running a season-high 97 plays and gained 632 yards, including rushing for a season-high 282 yards against the fifth-best rushing defense in the league. DSU entered the game allowing just 135.8 yards rushing per game. Meanwhile, Tech's defense held DSU to 322 yards on 65 plays, including holding the Statesmen to 78 yards rushing. Tech entered the game as No. 2 in the league at stopping the run (100.9 yards/game).

DeWitt finished the night 22-for-39 passing for 244 yards and had two touchdowns, while Deed finished the night with 224 all-purpose yards as he rushed for 57 yards, caught five passes for 62 yards and amassed 105 yards on five kickoff returns. Rambo led the DSU receiving corps as he caught nine passes for 111 yards.

Tech will close out the 2009 regular season next Saturday, Nov. 7, when they travel to Searcy, Ark., to face Harding in a 2 p.m. contest at First Security Stadium. Harding enters the game with a 5-5 overall record and a 3-4 GSC mark following its 27-22 home win Saturday over Henderson State

"We are in control of our own destiny in terms of the playoffs. We have one game left to go in the regular season and that is next Saturday in Searcy against Harding," Mullins said. "Our kids understand what's going on, now we have to return to work tomorrow afternoon and get ready for next weekend."

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