

ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

ATHLETICS

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

WONDER BOYS SCORE 31 FIRST HALF POINTS ENROUTE TO COLLECTING ROAD GSC WIN OVER HENDERSON STATE

ARKADELPHIA, Arkansas – Arkansas Tech Football began its final stretch of the regular season here Saturday by posting a 44-14 Gulf South Conference victory over Henderson State on Homecoming 2009 at Carpenter-Haygood Stadium on the HSU campus.

With the win, coupled with West Alabama's 10-9 loss Saturday at West Georgia, the Wonder Boys, who are ranked ninth in the latest NCAA Division II Super Regional Two poll, moved into sole possession of second place in the league standings with two weeks to go in the regular season.

"I thought our team was very focused today. They know they are close to something that is attainable," Tech Head Football Coach **Steve Mullins** said. "I thought our defense took a step forward today."

For the second straight game, Tech's pass and catch combo of senior quarterback **Nick Graziano** (Moraga, Calif.) and senior receiver **Frantz Simeon** (Belle Glade, Fla.) set new single game school records for passing yards and receiving yards. Graziano finished the game 38-for-52 passing for a school record 459 yards, while Simeon caught a school record 14 passes for 229 yards in the victory. The 459 passing yards bettered Graziano's mark of 431 set last week against West Georgia, while Simeon's 229 receiving yards bettered his old mark of 216 set last week against West Georgia. In addition, Simeon's 14 receptions broke the school mark of 13 held by **Tracey Stiger** set last season against North Alabama.

"I was put into a situation today where I could make plays and that is what I did," said Simeon, who has now caught 50 passes for 838 yards this season. "We are taking these last three games one at a time and today was the first of those steps."

Over the last two games, Graziano has combined to go 65-for-89 passing for 892 yards and has thrown 11 touchdown passes and has had two interceptions, while Simeon has combined to catch 24 passes for 445 yards and seven touchdowns. Graziano, who entered the game leading the GSC in both passing and total offensive yards, has passed for 400 or more yards in three of his last six games.

Tech (6-2 overall, 4-2 GSC) wasted little time in getting on the scoreboard as they drove 84 yards in 10 plays following HSU turning the ball over on downs to push out to a 7-0 lead following a 22-yard touchdown pass Graziano to junior tight end **Jarrold Martin** (Crossett, Ark.) with 7:47 left in the first quarter. Martin finished the game with a career-high nine catches for 92 yards.

The Wonder Boys pulled in front 14-0 on a 33-yard pass from Graziano to Simeon on a fourth-and-2 play with 4:28 left in the first period. Simeon's touchdown came five plays after HSU fumbled the ball at Tech's 49-yard line.

HSU (3-5 overall, 3-3 GSC) got on the scoreboard thanks to an 8-yard pass from Nick Hardesty to Michael Buse as the first quarter closed to drop Tech's lead to 14-7. HSU's scoring drive was aided by two penalties from the Wonder Boys.

The Wonder Boys pushed its lead to 17-7 just a little under six minutes into the second quarter on a 22-yard field goal by senior kicker **Travis Cockerham** (Bryant, Ark.). Cockerham's kick completed a 16-play, 73 yard drive by the Wonder Boys. Tech extended its lead to 24-7 on a 1-yard plunge by senior running back **Tim Childress** (Batesville, Ark.) with 2:42 left in the half. Childress' score capped an 11 play, 62-yard drive for the Wonder Boys.

Tech closed out the first half by driving 53 yards in seven plays and completed the drive with a 3-yard touchdown pass from Graziano to senior receiver **Landon Turner** (Destrehan, La.). The drive was set up following an interception by senior defensive back **Delvin Ellis** (Memphis, Tenn.) off a pass from HSU back-up quarterback Nathan Nall. Turner finished the game with nine catches for 113 yards and moved into ninth place on the school's all-time receiving yards chart with 1,522 yards as he passed **LaRon Marbley**, who recorded 1,443 receiving yards from 1994-97.

"Ellis' interception late in the second quarter was a big momentum shift," Mullins added.

Simeon, the reigning GSC Offensive Player of the Week, caught eight passes for 139 yards in the first half, while Turner had seven catches for 65 yards. Graziano was 25-for-34 passing for 295 yards and had three touchdown passes before halftime. Tech scored points on all five of its first-half possessions.

Tech opened the third quarter by driving 70 yards in eight plays and completed the drive with a 16-yard touchdown pass from Graziano to Simeon just a little over three minutes out of the locker room, but the extra point by Cockerham was missed to give Tech a 37-14 lead.

HSU, though, answered as the Reddies pulled within 37-14 with 7:59 left in the third period following an 82 yard touchdown pass from Hardesty to Josh Siphon. Siphon finished the game with five catches for 152 yards for the Reddies.

The Wonder Boys pushed its lead to 44-14 with 12:19 left in the fourth quarter on a 21-yard pass from Graziano to Simeon. The touchdown catch by Simeon was his 11th of the season, which ties the school's single-season touchdown reception mark held by **Steve Daniels** in 1996.

HSU, who entered the game as the GSC's top rushing team as they were averaging 195.1 yards per game on the ground, but Tech's defense held the Reddies to 37 yards rushing on 20 carries. Tech entered the game with the league's No. 2 rushing defense as they were allowing 110.0 rushing yards per contest. In addition to holding HSU to 37 rushing yards, the Reddies finished the game with 334 yards of total offense as Hardesty was 18-for-33 passing for 297 yards.

"I was proud of our defense's play today," the 13th-year Tech coach said. With the win, Mullins moves into a third-place tie with former North Alabama coach Wayne Grubb (1977-87) for third place on the GSC's career coaching wins list with 82.

Tech will return to action next Saturday, Oct. 31, when they play host to Delta State for a 6 p.m. contest in Thone Stadium at Buerkle Field. The game will mark the final home game for Tech's 21-member senior class as it will be Tech's final home game of the regular season.

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