

ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

ATHLETICS

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

WONDER BOYS SCORE TWO DEFENSIVE TOUCHDOWNS ENROUTE TO POSTING HOME GSC VICTORY OVER SOUTHERN ARKANSAS

RUSSELLVILLE, Arkansas – Arkansas Tech Football used two defensive touchdowns and a 16-point third quarter to post a 37-24 victory over Southern Arkansas in Gulf South Conference action in Thone Stadium at Buerkle Field.

The two defensive touchdowns helped the Wonder Boys snap a two-game losing skid to the Muleriders and improve Tech to 4-2 overall on the season and 2-2 in the GSC. Last season, Tech fell 45-42 in Magnolia and then suffered a 56-49 loss at home in 2007.

"Any time your defense scores two touchdowns in one game, you should always win that game," Tech Head Football Coach and Athletic Director **Steve Mullins** said following the game. "SAU's defense played lights out and they (the Muleriders) had a great game plan on offense, from the standpoint of their quick passing game."

The two defensive scores proved to be the difference in the game thanks to SAU's offense scoring 14 points in the fourth quarter, including scoring on a 93-yard touchdown pass from Austin Civita to Raphyael Tyson, to turn what was a 30-10 edge into a 13-point margin. The 93-yard touchdown pass to Tyson was the second-longest offensive touchdown in SAU history and the longest reception in the GSC this season.

"We were on cruise control in the fourth quarter because the score was so much in our favor, but instead of being intense and flying to the football, making good angles, we missed tackles and allowed some big plays," said Mullins, who picked up his 80th victory as Tech's coach with Saturday's win.

Tech missed a scoring opportunity on its first possession of the game as it recovered a fumble by SAU on the opening kickoff and drove 19 yards before faking a field goal on a fourth-and-10 play from inside SAU's 20-yard line. The fake field goal attempts came up five yards short.

"The fake field goal was all my call and we came up short on it," Mullins said.

Along with failing on a fake field goal, the Wonder Boys also had another scoring opportunity in the wasted early in the second quarter as senior kicker **Travis Cockerham** (Bryant, Ark.) missed wide left on a 32-yard field goal attempt.

SAU answered Cockerham's missed by driving 67 yards in eight plays and scoring the game's first points on a 30-yard field goal by Noe' Cuevas with 10:10 remaining in the first half.

Tech, though, responded as it drove 70 yards in 11 plays and complete the drive with a 7-yard touchdown pass from senior quarterback **Nick Graziano** (Moraga, Calif.) to senior receiver **Landon Turner** (Destrehan, La.). The big play on the drive was a 33-yard pass from Graziano to Turner. Turner finished the night with eight catches for 129 yards and moved him within 34 yards of **LaRon Marbley** for ninth

place on the school's all-time receiving yards list. Marbley recorded 1,443 receiving yards as a Wonder Boy from 1994-97.

The Wonder Boys extended its lead to 14-3 with 1:32 left in the first half thanks to a 75-yard fumble return by junior linebacker **Brandon Wright** (Stuttgart, Ark.). The fumble return, which was the first for a touchdown by a Wonder Boy since Tito Jose returned a fumble 44 yards for a score against Texas College in 2007, came after senior defensive back **Adrian Holiday** (West Helena, Ark.) sacked and forced a fumble by Civita.

SAU (1-5 overall, 1-4 GSC) went into halftime with some momentum as they drove 43 yards in six plays and capped the drive with a 28-yard touchdown pass from Civita to Tyson to cut Tech's lead to 14-10.

"I thought we played really, really hard. Our kids played as hard as they could play," Tech Defensive Coordinator **Jeff Byrd** said.

Byrd spent the previous four seasons as SAU's defensive coordinator before coming to Russellville this past offseason.

Tech's defense held the Muleriders to minus-2 yards rushing on 18 carries and sacked Civita four times for a loss of 40 yards. SAU finished the night with 417 yards of offense as Civita was 36-for-64 passing for 419 yards, but had two interceptions and the Muleriders also lost two fumbles. Tech's offense, which entered the game averaging nearly 500 yards and 38 points per game, was limited to a season-low 397 yards by the Muleriders. The Wonder Boys passed for 307 yards as Graziano was 23-for-40 passing and carried the ball 35 times for 90 yards.

"I felt there was a lack of focus tonight. Offensively, we got off to a slow start and didn't execute some basic things early in the game," the Tech coach said. "They (SAU) are pretty good on defense, but I didn't feel like our offense played very well tonight at every level."

Tech took the opening possession of the third quarter and drove 46 yards in nine plays and capped the drive with a 5-yard touchdown run by senior running back **Tim Childress** (Batesville, Ark.), but the ensuing extra point by Cockerham was missed to give Tech a 20-10 lead. Prior to the missed extra point, Cockerham was 24-for-24 on point-after attempts this season.

On SAU's ensuing possession, junior defensive back **RonDerrick Jackson** (Bossier City, La.) picked off a Civita pass at the Muleriders' 44-yard line. The interception set up Tech's next score as Cockerham connected on a 22-yard field goal with 8:39 left in the third quarter to give the Wonder Boys a 23-10 advantage.

The Wonder Boys pushed its lead to 30-10 late in the third quarter as senior defensive back **Tario Dansby** (Ashdown, Ark.) picked off a Civita pass and scampered downfield for a 60-yard touchdown. It was Dansby's second interception return for a touchdown this season and fourth in his Wonder Boy career. In Tech's 59-14 win over Arkansas-Monticello on Sept. 26, Dansby returned an interception 100 yards for a score.

SAU, though, pushed within 30-17 following Tyson's 93-yard touchdown reception with six minutes to go in the game. Tyson caught 10 passes for 202 yards in the loss.

Following Tyson's score, Tech's offense found the end zone once again as it drove 64 yards in two plays, completing the drive with a 59-yard touchdown pass from Graziano to senior receiver **Frantz Simeon** (Belle Glade, Fla.). Simeon finished the night with four catches for 87 yards and had 184 all-purpose yards as he returned three punts for 38 yards and two kickoffs for 59 yards.

The Muleriders completed the game's scoring with 46 seconds remaining as Civita hit Travarus Brown with a 12-yard touchdown pass.

In addition to Tyson, Rodney Brown caught 10 passes for 106 yards for the Muleriders.

One area of disappointment for Mullins was his team's seven penalties for 80 yards.

"We had way too many penalties, especially pass interference penalties," Mullins added.

The Wonder Boys return to action next Saturday when they welcome West Georgia for Homecoming 2009 on the Tech campus. Kickoff for the homecoming contest is set for 6 p.m. and it will mark Tech's Centennial Homecoming Celebration.

"We got the win and hopefully we can regroup a little bit, focus and get ready for West Georgia," Mullins said. "It will be homecoming, so hopefully we'll have a big crowd and all the good things that go with that."

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