

ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

ATHLETICS

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WONDER BOYS QUARTERBACK NICK GRAZIANO NAMED ONE OF 24 CANDIDATES FOR 2009 HARLON HILL TROPHY

FLORENCE, Alabama – Arkansas Tech senior quarterback **Nick Graziano** is one of 24 candidates in the running for the 2009 Harlon Hill Trophy as the NCAA Division II College Football Player of the Year as announced by the National Harlon Hill Award Committee on Friday.

This year's slate of 24 candidates includes two finalists from 2008 and two other players who were candidates last season. The list 24 candidates includes six players from each of Division II's four Super Regionals.

It is the third time since Tech moved to the NCAA Division II level in 1995 that the Wonder Boys have had a Harlon Hill Trophy candidate as former quarterbacks **Todd Cooley** and **Cole Barthel** were candidates for the award in 1997 and 2008 respectively.

Graziano, who is a native of Moraga, Calif., and a transfer from the University of Nevada, was one of the six players chosen from Super Regional Two. The other players named as candidates from Super Regional Two are North Alabama senior quarterback Harrison Beck, Carson-Newman senior quarterback Alex Good, Delta State senior linebacker Lardester Hicks-Green, Albany State senior running back Demetrice Johnson and Mars Hill sophomore running back Jonas Randolph.

"I am extremely proud for Nick. He is very deserving of this honor," Tech Head Football Coach and Athletic Director **Steve Mullins** said. "In his one season at Tech, Nick has rewritten almost all of our single-season passing records and will leave as one of the best quarterbacks to ever play here."

Graziano, who will play his final regular season game as a Wonder Boy on Saturday at Harding, earned his candidacy this season after setting nearly every single Tech single-season passing and total offense mark. On the season, Graziano has passed for a single-season school record 3,013 yards and has accounted for a school record 3,402 yards of total offense as he is also the team's leading rusher with 389 yards. As a passer, Graziano is 225-for-368 and has completed 61 percent of his passes and is averaging a GSC-best 334.8 passing yards and 378 yards of total offense. In addition, he has thrown a school record 27 touchdowns and has accounted for single-season school record 32 touchdowns as he has scored five times on the ground, including an 82-yard rushing score last Saturday against Delta State and has thrown nine interceptions. He enters Saturday's game with Harding ranked second nationally among all Division II players in total offense and is third nationally in both passing yards per game and points responsible for.

So far this season, Graziano has been named a Gulf South Conference Offensive Player of the Week four times, including the past two weeks and has been named a National Offensive Player of the Week by D2Football.com three times, including the previous two weeks. It is the first time since 1996 (Valdosta State's Lance Funderburk) that a GSC player has earned four Offensive Player of the Week accolades in the same season. He has also had Tech's only 400-yard passing games in school history, a feat which has happened three times this season, including throwing for a school record 456 yards in Tech's 44-14 win at Henderson State on Oct. 24 and has accounted for four of the school's Top 5 single-game total offensive performances in history, including gaining 546 yards of total offense in last week's 35-23 win over Delta State. The 546 yards of total offense is the sixth-best single-game effort in GSC history. Along with that, Graziano has had 41 plays of 20 yards or more and three of the Top 25 passing yard games in Division II Football this year.

Players for the Harlon Hill Trophy are nominated and voted on by the sports information directors at the 148 NCAA Division II football-playing schools. The initial 24 candidates will be placed on regional ballots and the top two players from each of the four NCAA regions will advance to the national Harlon Hill Trophy ballot when regional voting concludes on November 13.

The winner of this year's award, which is presented by the National Harlon Hill Award Committee, will be announced at the 24th annual Harlon Hill Trophy Presentation Banquet on Friday, Dec. 11 at the Florence Conference Center at 6:30 p.m. This year's Hill Trophy Banquet will also include the 11th induction into the Division II Football Hall of Fame, with Shannon Sharpe becoming the 25th inductee. The Harlon Hill Trophy Presentation is one day before the NCAA Division II Championship Game, which is scheduled for noon on Saturday, Dec. 12 at Florence's Braly Municipal Stadium.

Tickets for the Harlon Hill Banquet are \$50 each or \$400 for a table of eight and can be purchased by calling the Shoals Chamber of Commerce at (256) 764-4661. The Harlon Hill Trophy is sponsored by the City of Florence, Ala., Florence-Lauderdale Tourism, Opti-Net, the Marriott Shoals Hotel and Spa and Herff Jones.

Abilene Christian running back Bernard Scott was the winner of last year's Harlon Hill Trophy. Texas A&I (now Texas A&M-Kingsville) running back Johnny Bailey was the award's only three-time winner (1987-89), while Valdosta State quarterback Dusty Bonner won the award in back-to-back years (2000 and 2001). Since the award's inception in 1986, four different players from the GSC have won the award, with the most recent winner being North Alabama quarterback Will Hall in 2003. Other GSC winners of the Hill Trophy are Valdosta State quarterback Chris Hatcher in 1994 and North Alabama linebacker Ronald McKinnon in 1995.

Among the returning candidates from last season for this year's Hill Trophy are Grand Valley State senior quarterback Brad Iciek and Edinboro University senior quarterback Trevor Harris, both of whom were finalists last season. Also appearing on the ballot for the second consecutive year are Northwest Missouri State senior running back LaRon Council and Ashland senior quarterback Billy Cundiff.

Here is a list of candidates for this year's Harlon Hill Trophy from the other three super regions.

Super Regional 1 –West Liberty State junior quarterback Zach Amedro, Shippensburg senior split end Michael Harris, Edinboro's Trevor Harris, Clarion

junior running back Alfonso Hoggard, California [PA] senior receiver A.J. Jackson and Concord sophomore receiver Thomas Mayo.

Super Regional 3 – Wayne State [MI] senior running back Joique Bell, Cundiff, Iciek, Wayne State [NE] senior receiver Logan Masters, Minnesota-Duluth junior running back Isaac Odim and Colorado School of Mines senior quarterback David Pesek.

Super Regional 4 - Council, Midwestern State junior quarterback Zack Eskridge, Southwest Baptist junior quarterback Steve Gachette, Texas A&M-Kingsville senior quarterback Billy Garza, Eastern New Mexico sophomore quarterback J.J. Harp and Missouri Western junior quarterback Drew Newhart.

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