

ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

ATHLETICS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 30, 2009

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ARKANSAS TECH SOFTBALL TO OPEN 2009 GSC TOURNAMENT FRIDAY AGAINST WEST ALABAMA

RUSSELLVILLE, Arkansas – For the second straight season, the Arkansas Tech Golden Suns Softball team heads to Southaven, Miss., and the 2009 Gulf South Conference Tournament as the No. 1 seed from the West Division after earning its second consecutive West Division championship thanks to its three wins last weekend over Arkansas-Monticello.

Tech, who enters the GSC Tournament sporting a 40-20 record, which is the most wins in regular season history and a No. 10 ranking in the latest NCAA Division II South Region poll, will open the GSC Tournament at 9:30 a.m. at the Greenbrook Softball Complex on Friday, May 1 against West Alabama, the No. 4 seed out of the GSC East Division. The Lady Tigers, who are ranked eighth in the latest NCAA D-II South Region poll, enter the tournament sporting a 42-16 overall record and finished with 12-14 mark in the East Division.

If Tech wins its first round match-up with West Alabama, it will face the winner of the #1 Alabama-Huntsville/Delta State games in a winner's bracket game at 5 p.m. on Friday and if it loses to UWA, it will meet the loser of the UAH/DSU game at 9:30 a.m. on Saturday in the consolation bracket. The GSC Tournament is a double-elimination format and the winner of the tournament receives the GSC's automatic bid to the NCAA Division II Softball Tournament, which begins next weekend at regional sites to be announced.

Friday's match-up with West Alabama will mark the second meeting this season between the two teams as the Lady Tigers earned a 9-8 victory over Tech in the team's only meeting at the GSC Crossover Tournament in Decatur, Ala., on April 5.

"We are excited about returning to Southaven this weekend and playing in the GSC Tournament for the second consecutive season," Golden Suns Head Coach **Gidget Pambianchi** said. "This is an exciting time for our players, our program and our school."

Tech, who enters the postseason having won 11 of its last 12 games, with the only loss being a 5-3 setback in its regular season finale last Sunday at UAM, is making its second straight appearance in the GSC Tournament this season as the Golden Suns went 3-2 at last year's affair and advanced to the championship round before falling 8-0 to Alabama-Huntsville. Tech would've needed to defeat UAH two times on the final day of the tournament to win the GSC title.

Since beginning softball in the 2003, Tech is 2-4 all-time against UWA as the Golden Suns have lost two straight to the Lady Tigers since earning a 3-1 win at the 2006 GSC Crossover Tournament in Decatur, Ala.

In addition to Tech's game with West Alabama, other the first-round contest on Tech's half of the bracket is #1 ranked Alabama-Huntsville (45-4, 22-3 GSC), the No. 2 seed from the East Division facing Delta State (27-23, 15-15 GSC), the No. 3 seed from the West Division at 9:30 a.m. The bottom half of the bracket has No. 5 ranked and GSC

East Division champion Valdosta State (51-6, 23-2 GSC) facing Ouachita Baptist (24-29, 12-18 GSC), the No. 4 seed from the West Division at 12 p.m. and Arkansas-Monticello (38-15, 17-13 GSC), the No. 2 seed from the West Division playing West Florida (40-15, 15-11 GSC), the No. 3 seed from the East Division at 2:30 p.m.

On the season, Tech is 11-5 against the teams that qualified for this year's GSC Tournament, including going 10-2 against the three other West Division squads. Here is Tech's record against this season's GSC Tournament field – Delta State (4-0), Arkansas-Monticello (3-1), Ouachita Baptist (3-1), West Florida (1-0), Alabama-Huntsville (0-1), West Alabama (0-1) and Valdosta State (0-1).

Tech enters the GSC Tournament with a team batting average of .295 and is third in the league with a school-record 468 hits and has scored a school record 243 runs. Sophomore first baseman **Tiphani Moon** (Eules, Texas), one of Tech's four repeat First-Team All-GSC West Division selections on Wednesday, leads Tech's offense with a school single-season best .376 average and also leads the team in doubles (13), RBIs (36) and has hit a single-season record tying nine home runs. In addition to Moon, senior rightfielder **Sarah Pratt** (Garland, Texas), a three-time All-GSC West Division selection and a two-time First-Team honoree, leads the team in hits (78), runs scored (43), at-bats (211) and triples (9). All of those marks by Pratt are new single-season Tech records.

Meanwhile, the biggest strength of Tech's team is its pitching as the Golden Suns have compiled a school single-season best ERA of 1.77 as they have allowed just 104 earned runs in a school-record 411.0 innings pitched. Junior **Casey Hammons** (Carthage, Texas), another of Tech's repeat First-Team All-GSC honorees and a four-time GSC West Division Pitcher of the Week this season, leads the way as she has posted a 19-6 record and a single-season team best 1.09 ERA, which is fourth in the latest GSC statistics. On the season, Hammons has made 36 appearances, 24 starts, has tossed 17 complete games and has tied a single-season school record with seven shutouts. In addition, she has thrown 186.1 innings and has allowed 126 hits, 29 earned runs, while walking 53 and striking out 181, which is the second-best mark in school history. Hammons has also thrown two no-hitters, including throwing the third perfect game in school history earlier this season against Arkansas-Pine Bluff. Joining Hammons in the circle this season is freshman **Morgan Rodgers** (Mansfield, Texas). Rodgers, who was named a Second-Team All-GSC West Division selection and has been a two-time GSC West Division Pitcher of the Week, has compiled a 16-11 record with a 1.92 ERA, but she leads the team in appearances (39), starts (28) and has thrown five complete games and one shutout. In 171.1 innings of work, Rodgers has allowed 167 hits and 73 runs (47 earned runs), while walking 41 and fanning 77.

For the third consecutive season, all of the games at this year's GSC Softball Tournament will have live broadband video streaming through an agreement between the GSC and Penn Atlantic. The broadband broadcasts will be available for a per game fee at www.pennatlantic.com or you log on to www.gulfsouthconference.org for more information about the tournament and the broadband broadcasts. In addition, all of the Tech's games will be broadcast live on the radio in the Russellville area by River Valley Radio and also on the internet at <http://athletics.atu.edu>. Friday's game against West Alabama will be heard on KVLD (99.3 FM).

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