

ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

ATHLETICS

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GOLDEN SUNS TENNIS SET TO OPEN GSC TOURNAMENT AGAINST FIFTH-RANKED WEST FLORIDA

RUSSELLVILLE, Arkansas – Arkansas Tech Golden Suns Tennis is set to make its second consecutive appearance in school history in the 2009 Gulf South Conference Tournament on Friday when they hit the court at Lagoon Park in Montgomery, Ala., against fifth-ranked West Florida in the quarterfinal round at 8:30 a.m.

Tech, who is the No. 3 seed out of the West Division, after finishing the regular season with a school-record 16 wins and posting a 16-4 overall record and a 4-2 mark in the GSC. The third-place finish in the West Division is the highest league finish for the Golden Suns in tennis since the 1995 squad won the AIC (Arkansas Intercollegiate Conference) Championship.

"We have had a great season. It is going to be hard to top our 16 wins," Golden Suns Head Coach **Abby Davis** said. "One thing about this season is that a lot of those wins are against quality opponents. Our strength of schedule is probably the best it has ever been."

Tech's strength of schedule this season has the Golden Suns in contention to earn its second berth into the NCAA Division II South Regional Tournament. Tech, who qualified for the NCAA Tournament in 2002, enters Friday's GSC Tournament ranked 12th in the latest South Region poll. Tech finished the regular season with an 11-4 record against in-region teams.

Davis said that her team is excited about returning to Montgomery once again this season.

"We're excited about getting the chance to return to the GSC Tournament this season," Davis said. "We have a tough first round match against No. 5 ranked West Florida, but we're ready for the challenge. All the pressure is on West Florida.

"We are going to go out and play relaxed."

In addition to Tech's first-round match with West Florida on Friday, other first round matches in the tournament are 25th-ranked Delta State, the West Division champion facing West Alabama, the No. 4 seed from the East Division at 8:30 a.m., fourth-ranked Valdosta State, the East Division champion, facing Harding, the No. 4 seed from the West Division at 11 a.m. and Henderson State, the No. 2 seed from the West Division meeting North Alabama, the No. 3 seed from the East Division at 11 a.m. The four quarterfinal winners meet in the semifinals on Friday afternoon at 2 and 4:30 p.m., while the four quarterfinal losers will meet in the consolation semifinals at 2 and 4:30 p.m. on Friday. The tournament's championship match is schedule for 12 p.m. on Saturday, April 18.

Tech enters the postseason having won four straight matches, including posting a 5-4 win last Friday over Harding without the services of its No. 2 player, sophomore

Saki Matsuoka (Saitama, Japan), who had returned home due to a death in the family. The win over Harding completed Tech's first-ever season sweep over the Lady Bison in school history.

Matsuoka, who was named the GSC West Division Freshman of the Year last season, returned to campus late Monday evening and will be in the line-up for Friday's match with the Lady Argonauts.

"That Harding match was a turning point in our season," Davis said. "It showed our team that we really were a good team as we able to go out and beat a very good Harding team without one of our better players."

Davis said that she didn't have a clue what kind of year her team would have entering the school year.

"I had no clue how good we would be prior to the beginning of this season," said the fifth-year Tech coach and former All-GSC selection with the Golden Suns in 2001. "Every time we played, this team kept surprising me. This is the best group of singles players we've ever had at Tech."

Heading into Friday's GSC Tournament opener, Tech has won a single-season school record 104 wins in singles play and has posted a 104-49 mark in singles action.

"Our singles play this season has been amazing," Davis said. "But one thing I've been pleased with is our doubles play."

Entering the season, Davis was concerned with her doubles line-up as the No. 2 and 3 teams both had to be remade from last season. Tech has posted a 54-23 overall record in doubles action, including its No. 1 doubles team of senior **Anna Carson** (Fort Smith, Ark.) and Matsuoka posting a single-season school-best mark of 20-4.

"Anna and Saki can beat anyone they play at No. 1 doubles," the Tech coach added. "And other two doubles teams have gotten better as the season progressed. In the four matches we've lost, it was because we lost two out of three in doubles."

Another reason for Tech's success this season has been the play of its two seniors – Carson and **Kristen Brown** (Winona, Texas).

"Our seniors have been the catalyst for our success this season," said Davis. "They have provided a lot of leadership both on and off the court."

Brown, who plays No. 4 singles and is paired with sophomore **Jessica James** (Lead Hill, Ark.) at No. 3 doubles, won a school record 20 singles matches this season and is tied with former Golden Sun **Whitney Simmons** for the school's career mark in singles wins with 51. Brown has posted a 51-29 mark in singles matches and is second in school history in career victories with 90 as she has won 39 doubles matches in four seasons.

"Kristen moved up this season to No. 4 after playing at No. 5 last season and has just dominated," the Tech coach said. "She just goes out and wins matches and refuses to lose. Her matches aren't even close as she wins them by scores of 6-0, 6-1."

Carson, who was one Tech's three All-GSC West Division performers last season, has compiled a 23-18 mark playing at the No. 1 singles spot since transferring prior to last season from Oklahoma State. In addition, Carson and Matsuoka have posted a 34-9 mark at No. 1 doubles the past two seasons.

"We would not be here without Anna. Her leadership took this team to another level," Davis added.

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