

ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

ATHLETICS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: November 12, 2008

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

VOLLEYBALL PLACES FOUR PLAYERS ON ALL-GSC WEST DIVISION TEAM; BENDA NAMED WEST DIVISION FRESHMAN OF THE YEAR AND BAYER NAMED WEST DIVISION COACH OF THE YEAR

RUSSELLVILLE, Arkansas – Just two days before the start of the 2008 Gulf South Conference Volleyball Tournament, the Arkansas Tech Golden Suns had five players and its coach honored by the league on its All-GSC West Division Team.

The All-GSC teams are voted on by the league's head coaches in their own respective divisions and the coaches were not allowed to vote for their own players.

Seniors **Kayla Allison** (Tulsa, Okla.), **Racheal Urquhart** (Chatham, Ont.), **Dana Florian** (Wilmington, Ill.), along with sophomore **Sarah Von Lienen** (Lakeland, Tenn.) were honored by the league on the West Division teams, while **Brennae Benda** (Woodstock, Ill.) became the sixth Golden Sun player to be named the West Division's Freshman of the Year. In addition, Golden Suns Head Coach **Kristy Bayer** was named the West Division Coach of the Year, becoming the first Tech volleyball coach to win Coach of the Year honors.

"It is an honor to see that a majority of our starters were honored by the league this season," Tech Head Volleyball Coach **Kristy Bayer** said. "It just shows the quality of our team. I'm happy to see our players rewarded for our successful season."

Allison, Urquhart and Von Lienen were named First-Team All-GSC West Division selections, while Florian was a repeat Second-Team All-GSC honoree. With her first team selection this season, Allison becomes just the second Golden Sun player and the first in the Division II era (1995-present) to be named All-Conference four straight years, including being a first team selection the past two seasons. In addition, Urquhart was a second team selection last season and Von Lienen was named the West Division's Freshman of the Year.

"I also honored to have been chosen by my peers in the West Division as the Coach of the Year," the fifth-year Tech coach added.

Tech, Harding, East Division champion West Florida and North Alabama each had a total of 16 players selected to one of the division's two teams, as each of the teams had four selections overall.

Harding, who finished as the West Division runner-up, prevented a Tech sweep of the league's major awards as junior Manuela Nesheva was named the West Division's Player of the Year. Meanwhile, in the East Division, North Alabama middle blocker Whitney Sanders was named the Player of the Year, while West Alabama setter Alexis McHale was named the Freshman of the Year and West Florida's Melissa Wolter repeated as the East Division's Coach of the Year.

It was the fourth straight season that Tech had a First-Team All-GSC selection and the first time the Golden Suns had three first team honorees since 2002.

Benda becomes the second consecutive Golden Suns to receive West Division Freshman of the Year honors as Von Lienen earned that honor in 2007. Benda earns the Freshman of the Year honor after averaging a team-best 3.67 digs per set and recording 18 double-digit dig matches. In addition, Benda, who was named a West Division Defensive Player of the Week honoree during the season, recorded 41 service aces, which was second on the team.

"She came in from the outset and never played like a freshman," Bayer said. "She was an experienced player and I'm very happy for her."

Allison repeats as a First-Team selection this season as she averaged 9.99 assists and 2.04 digs per set and became the school's all-time leader in career assists with 5,146. In addition, Allison is third in career digs with 1,124, fourth in career double-figure dig matches with 46 and is fifth in both career service aces with 153 and double-doubles with 46. Along with her back-to-back First-Team All-GSC West Division honors, Allison is also a three-time *ESPN The Magazine* Academic All-District selection.

"Kayla has had a standout career both on and off the court with Arkansas Tech," Bayer said. "She will leave Tech as one of the finest setters to play here and she is very deserving of all the honors she's received."

Florian earns her second straight second team honor having averaging 2.56 kills, 0.87 blocks and 0.63 digs per set and is hitting .292 on the season. On the season, Florian has had 13 double-digit kill matches and has hit .500 or better in 10 matches. She will Tech as the school's career Division II leader in blocks with 496 and is also fifth in career kills (1,290) and fourth in career double-digit kill matches (68).

"Dana was a four-year starter for us and she had provided dominant play at the net over those four years," the Tech coach said. "Her play at the net will be hard to replace."

Von Lienen earns first team honors after averaging a GSC-best 1.08 blocks per set. In addition, Von Lienen averages 2.62 kills per set and is hitting .362 on the season. Von Lienen has had 12 double-figure kill matches and has had five or more blocks in 13 matches. Von Lienen, who was a four-time GSC West Division Player of the Year this season, also holds the school's single-season Division II era block record of 153 and is sixth on the school's career Division II era blocking chart with 277.

"Sarah was a standout for us, both offensively and defensively with her blocking this season," Bayer added.

Urquhart, who was a Preseason All-GSC West Division selection, leads Tech in kills with 321 and is second in digs with 283 and has also recorded 30 service aces. In addition, she holds the school's career marks in kills (1,565), digs (1,404), double-figure kill matches (80) and double-figure dig matches (66). She also is fourth in career double-doubles (49).

"Racheal is a well-rounded player and there aren't many like her," the Tech coach said. "She will leave Tech holding not only the school record for kills, but she also holds the school's career record for digs."

Joining Allison, Von Lienen and Urquhart on the West Division First-Team were Nesheva, Harding twosome of setter Leah Tepe and middle blocker Shellie Rummer, along with Henderson State libero Bethany Wright, Ouachita Baptist outside hitter Meredith Henry and Christian Brothers middle blocker Aubrey Pancratz.

Meanwhile, Florian was joined on the GSC West Division's Second-Team by Arkansas-Monticello teammates, setter Meagan Martin and outside hitter Jalyynn Thornton, along with Christian Brothers duo of right side hitter Hanna Orendorff and

outside hitter Jenna Cherry. The other second team members were Southern Arkansas teammates, libero Mallory McKee and middle blocker Maggie Ross, along with Harding libero Emily Tate.

Sanders was joined on the East Division First-Team by her UNA teammate, libero Jessica Hansen, along with Valdosta State outside hitter Irene Hannan, West Georgia outside hitter Andressa Martins, West Alabama teammates, outside hitter Allison Nail and outside hitter Ana Gabriela Pedrosa and West Florida's threesome of middle hitter Patricia Gandolfo, setter Madeline Gonzalez and right side hitter Luciana Rapach.

The East Division Second-Team is headlined by North Alabama teammates, setter Alison Jacobs and outside hitter Kelly Pratt, along with West Florida outside hitter Chelsea Wilhoite, Montevallo middle hitter Monika Tortorici and West Alabama's threesome of outside hitter Jessica Crook, middle blocker Jordan Kent and McHale.

-- Tech Athletics --