

ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

ATHLETICS

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Contact: Joe Raasch, GA SID (479) 968-0645

ARKANSAS TECH ENDS SEASON WITH HARD-FOUGHT FIVE-SET LOSS TO WEST ALABAMA IN FIRST ROUND OF GSC TOURNAMENT

SEARCY, Arkansas – Arkansas Tech Volleyball saw its 2009 season come to an end here Friday by dropping a hard-fought five-set loss to West Alabama (21-25, 25-21, 13-25, 25-23, 15-13) here Friday in the first round of the Gulf South Conference Tournament at Rhodes Fieldhouse on the campus of Harding University.

Tech, whose roster featured no seniors this season, came into the match as the No. 3 seed out of the West Division after finishing with an 8-4 regular season mark in the West Division, while West Alabama was the co-champion out of the East Division, but earned the No. 2 seed due to losing a tiebreaker with West Florida.

With the loss, Tech finishes the season with a 24-13 record and the Golden Suns have now lost in the first round the past four trips to the tournament and haven't advanced out of the first round since 2002.

In Friday's match, Tech came out on fire in the first set as they jumped out to an early 6-2 lead, but UWA (29-7 overall on the season) came back and cut the lead to two following a kill by Jordan Kent to pull the Lady Tigers within 11-9. From that point, Tech took control of the set as they scored 14 of the final 26 points to post the 25-21 win.

UWA, though, came back in the second set and jumped out to a 7-3 lead. Tech fought back and took a lead following an attack error by UWA's Brittany Cousins. The Lady Tigers rallied and took a six point lead, before Tech pulled within 22-19 in the waning moments of the set after a kill by junior right side hitter **Ashlynn Hamrick** (Jackson, Mich.). UWA, though, was able to finally shut the door on the Golden Suns after a kill by Thais Hollerbach to post a 25-21 victory.

Tech came out white hot in the third set as they sailed to a 14-4 lead before UWA started to put something together. Tech, though, had other thoughts as they put the Lady Tigers in a 20-7 hole after a kill by freshman middle hitter **Brittany Ryan** (Mena, Ark.). The Golden Suns eventually put UWA away 25-13 after junior setter **Kera Dukic** (White Lake, Mich.) flicked a quick kill over the net.

UWA jumped in front 5-3 in the fourth set, but Tech fought back to tie the set a 5-5 after an attack error by Jessica Crook. From that point, both teams would have five more ties until UWA used two service aces by Alexis McHale to finally retake the lead at 12-11. The Golden Suns would not go away quietly and fought to the end until McHale ended the set with a kill to give UWA a 25-23 win to force a fifth and deciding game.

In the win-or-go-home set, UWA came out and took a 3-1 lead. Tech once again fought back to tie it at 3-3 after a kill by sophomore outside hitter **Laura Farney** (Morton, Ill.). UWA, though, would again take the lead but could not really gain control of the set as Tech continued to threaten. Tech again would tie the match

at 8 off a ball handling error by UWA's Casey Byrnes. The Lady Tigers increased its lead to 10-8, but Tech would not end its season without a fight, but UWA proved to be too much as they hung on for a 15-13 win and advance to a semifinal match-up Saturday with Harding, who opened the tournament with a five-set win over Valdosta State.

Farney, who was one of Tech's two First-Team All-GSC West Division selections, led the way with a double-double of 22 kills and 19 digs. It was Farney's team-best 14th double-double of the season. In addition to Farney, Tech's other First-Team All-GSC West Division selection, junior middle blocker **Sarah Von Lienen** (Lakeland, Tenn.) added 17 kills and five total blocks, while Dukic, a Second-Team All-GSC West Division honoree, had 50 assists and five kills in the loss and sophomore libero **Brennae Benda** (Woodstock, Ill.), a Second-Team All-GSC West Division, had 13 digs.

Crook led UWA with 20 kills and 10 digs, while Hollerbach had 15 kills for the Lady Tigers in the win.

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