

ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

ATHLETICS

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ARKANSAS TECH MEN'S BASKETBALL SET TO FACE BENEDICT IN SATURDAY'S NCAA DIVISION II SOUTH REGIONAL TOURNAMENT

LAKELAND, Florida – Arkansas Tech Men's Basketball is set to make history here once again Saturday evening when the Wonder Boys face 14th-ranked Benedict College in the first round of the NCAA Division II South Regional hosted by Florida Southern College. Tip-off for Saturday's game is set for 7:30 p.m. CST at the Jenkins Fieldhouse on the Florida Southern campus.

The NCAA D-II Tournament appearance is the first for the Wonder Boys since joining the Division II level in 1996 and Tech's first game in a national postseason tournament since losing to Georgetown [KY] in the second round of the 1996 NAIA National Tournament in Tulsa, Okla.

In addition to Tech-Benedict, the other first round match-ups Saturday at Jenkins Fieldhouse are No. 2 seeded and 15th-ranked Christian Brothers (22-6) facing No. seeded Delta State (21-8) at 11 a.m. CST; No. 3 seeded and 10th-ranked Claflin (24-3) meeting No. 6 seed Valdosta State (24-6), the GSC East Division champions and No. 1 seeded and 11th-ranked Florida Southern (27-6), the regular season and postseason champion from the Sunshine State Conference meeting No. 8 seed LeMoyne-Owen (17-13), who earned its tournament berth by winning the SIAC Tournament.

Tech, who is 22-8 overall on the season and received three votes in this week's final NABC/Division II Coaches' Top 25 Poll, earned its first-ever NCAA Tournament appearance thanks to winning its first-ever Gulf South Conference title in men's basketball at last weekend's GSC Tournament in Southaven, Miss. Tech picked up a 79-66 win over Valdosta State in Sunday's GSC title game.

"Our goal was to always be in the NCAA Tournament," Wonder Boys Head Coach **Mark Downey** said prior to his team's practice Thursday at St. Leo University. "It was great to win the GSC Tournament and that was unbelievable moment for our program, but our goal has always been on making it to the NCAA Tournament."

Downey hopes that his team has their feet under them and is grounded come Saturday evening after winning its first-ever GSC title in men's basketball.

"I hope we get back to playing like we have the past 10 games, with a chip on our shoulder," Downey said. "In order for us to be successful, we have to do what we do best, which is defend and rebound."

On paper, it appears as if Saturday's match with Benedict will be a defensive contest as the Tigers enter the game ranked first nationally in all of D-II in three-point field goal defense (27.3 percent) and they are eighth in field goal percentage

defense (39.1 percent), seventh in blocked shots (5.5 per game) and are 13th in scoring defense (61.9 points/game), while Tech enters the game ranked eighth in three-point field goal defense (29 percent), 13th in rebound margin (+7.7 per game) and 15th in field goal percentage defense (39.8 percent).

Leading the way for Tech entering Saturday's NCAA South Regional match-up are senior guard **Chad Henderson** (Memphis, Tenn.), senior center **Thiago Cordeiro** (Recife, Brazil), junior guard **Brandon Friedel** (Victoria, Texas) and senior forward **Troy Marcus** (Bronx, NY).

Henderson, who was named a First-Team All-GSC West Division selection and was also named to the GSC All-Tournament Team, is averaging 13.9 points per game and has reached double figures in 24 games, while Cordeiro, who was also named a First-Team All-GSC West Division selection and a GSC All-Tournament Team honoree, is averaging 11.6 points and a team-best 5.6 rebounds per game and leads the GSC and is eighth nationally in blocked shots at 2.7 per game and also leads the GSC in field goal percentage at 62 percent. Cordeiro holds the school's single-season record for blocked shots (80) and also the school's single-game blocked shot mark (8 against Delta State). Friedel, the third of Tech's four GSC All-Tournament selections, is averaging 9.9 points per game and is shooting 47 percent from the field and a GSC-best 48 percent from the three-point line and Marcus is averaging 9.8 points and 5.2 rebounds per game and is shooting 61 percent from the floor, which is second in the GSC and has recorded three double-doubles.

Tech's opponent on Saturday, Benedict, enters the tournament sporting a 24-5 overall record and earned an at-large berth in the NCAA Tournament after falling in the SIAC Tournament semifinals to Lane College. The Tigers have 20 or more games for four consecutive seasons and have compiled a 52-10 record the past two seasons. In addition, Benedict is making its fourth consecutive trip to the NCAA Tournament and advanced to the South Regional finals last season in Lakeland, Fla., last season when the Tigers were the No. 2 seed. Benedict lost 97-75 to North Alabama in the regional finals.

Leading the way for the Tigers is sophomore forward Michael Holmes, senior guard/forward Bennie Lewis and senior point guard Darius Lane. Holmes, who was a First-Team All-SIAC selection, is averaging 12.1 points and 9.0 rebounds per game, while Lewis is averaging 11.3 points and 4.1 rebounds per game and is shooting 43 percent from the field and Lane, a Second-Team All-SIAC selection, is averaging 11.2 points and 5.9 assists per game, which is 18th nationally. Another key performer for Benedict is senior post player Martinez Woody, who is averaging 10.4 points, 10.5 rebounds and 3.3 blocked shots per game.

"They (Benedict) are a very talented team that has a very quick point guard, a post player averaging a double-double and two very good wing players that can shoot the ball," the third-year Tech coach said, who has compiled a 46-40 record with the Wonder Boys. "We don't know a ton about them, but I do know they aren't very deep and play 7 or 8 guys. They will present some challenges to our team."

Saturday's game will not be televised or broadcast via broadband, but it will be heard on the radio on River Valley Radio and KWKK (100.9 FM) in the Russellville area and also on the internet at <http://athletics.atu.edu>.

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