

ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

ATHLETICS

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WONDER BOYS WIN ITS FIRST-EVER GSC CHAMPIONSHIP; POSTS VICTORY OVER VALDOSTA STATE IN GSC TITLE GAME

SOUTHAVEN, Mississippi – Arkansas Tech Men’s Basketball concluded its historical run through the 2009 Gulf South Conference Tournament here Sunday afternoon at the DeSoto County Civic Center by posting a 79-66 win over Valdosta State to secure its first-ever GSC Championship and earn the league’s automatic berth into next weekend’s NCAA Division II Basketball Tournament.

Along with winning its first-ever GSC title in men’s basketball in its first-ever appearance in the GSC Championship game, Tech also earned its first-ever berth into the NCAA D-II Tournament. In addition, it was Tech’s 18th all-time conference title, but its first since winning the AIC (Arkansas Intercollegiate Conference) title in 1995.

“This is a big day for Arkansas Tech Basketball. Everything came together this weekend for this moment to happen,” Wonder Boys Head Coach **Mark Downey** said following his team’s championship celebration. “I am proud of these guys. This group has a never say die attitude.”

With the win, Tech improves to 22-8 overall on the season, while VSU falls to 24-6.

Tech, who posted three straight double-digit victories in the GSC Tournament, dominated the All-Tournament Team selections as four Wonder Boys were named to the team. Junior guard **Renard Allen** (New Orleans, La.) was named the Tournament MVP, while senior center **Thiago Cordeiro** (Recife, Brazil), senior guard **Chad Henderson** (Memphis, Tenn.) and junior guard **Brandon Friedel** (Victoria, Texas) were named All-Tournament selections. Joining Tech’s contingent of four All-Tournament honorees was Harding sophomore forward Kevin Brown, Valdosta State junior guard Ricardo Lewis and Valdosta State junior forward Tyrone Curnell.

In Sunday’s win over VSU, Tech used a strong second-half defensive effort that held the Blazers without a field goal for almost 10 minutes and limited VSU to just 32 percent shooting from the field, including a 23 percent output in the second half. In addition, Tech finished with a 42-37 edge on the glass.

“If we rebound and defend we have a good chance to beat anyone we play and I thought we did those two things very well today, especially in the second half,” the third-year Tech coach said. “To hold them without a basket for almost 10 minutes in the second half is just unbelievable.”

While VSU’s offense struggled in the second half, Tech’s began to cook as the Wonder Boys shot 61 percent from the floor after halftime. Allen, senior forward **Dusan Radivojevic** (Belgrade, Serbia) and senior forward **Troy Marcus** (Bronx, NY) scored 32 of Tech’s 44 second-half points.

Allen finished with a career-high 25 points, while Radivojevic added 16 points, including scoring 10 of those points in the second half. In addition, Marcus tallied 13 points, while Henderson and Cordeiro each scored 10 points in the win.

"Renard made some big plays today. He got it started for us early," Downey said. "He made things happen and when he is clicking, he is tough to stop."

All of that offense by Allen was needed as VSU's defense held Friedel, who was averaging 17 points and 10.5 rebounds per game in two GSC Tournament games, scoreless in 35 minutes of action. It was the second time this season that Friedel had been held scoreless.

"We have 7 or 8 guys on this team that can score the ball, so when one or two players struggle, others have picked up the slack all season and today was no different," the Tech coach added.

In the first half, VSU held a 33-27 lead with 2:47 remaining following a three-pointer from De'Andre Johnson. After Johnson's trey, the Wonder Boys closed the half on an 8-0 run to go into halftime with a 35-33 lead. The run was capped by a three-pointer from Radivojevic with 44 seconds left.

"Duce's three at the end of the first half gave us some momentum heading into the locker room," said Downey, who improved to 46-40 as Tech's coach. "They (VSU) threw a lot of punches at us today, and every time they did, we punched back."

VSU was paced by 12 points from Curnell, while Marvin Dibble and Tristan Crawford added nine points in the loss.

For the game, Tech finished shooting 49 percent from the field, but shot just 3-for-11 (27 percent) from the 3-point line and 62 percent (18-for-29) from the free throw line. VSU shot 31 percent (8-for-26) from long distance and 74 percent (20-for-27), including 14-for-20 in the second half from the foul line. In addition, Tech held a 44-18 edge in points in the paint and blocked six shots for the game. The six blocks set a new single-season record of 124 blocks for Tech, which bettered the old single-season record of 123 blocks, which was set during the 1988-89 season.

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