

ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

ATHLETICS

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WONDER BOYS HISTORICAL RUN THROUGH GSC TOURNAMENT REACHES CHAMPIONSHIP GAME; POSTS SEMIFINAL WIN OVER HARDING

SOUTHAVEN, Mississippi – Arkansas Tech Men’s Basketball continued its historical run through the 2009 Gulf South Conference Tournament here Saturday night by posting a 72-62 win over Harding in its first-ever semifinal appearance at the DeSoto County Civic Center.

Saturday’s win advances Tech (21-8 on the season) to its first-ever berth in the GSC Tournament Championship Game in just its third-ever tournament appearance in school history. Tech will meet Valdosta State at 2:45 p.m. on Sunday in the championship game, which will be broadcast live on regional television by CSS/Cox Sports. The meeting with Valdosta State will be the first-ever match-up against the Blazers. VSU earned its berth in the championship game with its 78-61 win over Delta State.

“What an unbelievable win tonight for our program. We’re one step closer to our goal on winning a GSC title,” Wonder Boys Head Coach **Mark Downey** said. “We have a chance to play for a championship tomorrow afternoon and that is just amazing considering where we started at three years ago.”

In Saturday’s win, Tech used a 53-30 edge on the glass and a defense that forced Harding into 31 percent shooting from the field, including 14 percent (3-for-21) shooting from the 3-point line. The rebounding advantage was needed as Tech committed 28 turnovers that led to 30 of Harding’s 63 points.

“It was a crazy game. We outrebounded them (HU) by 23, but committed 28 turnovers, which kept them within striking distance most of the night,” the third-year Tech coach. “We need to do a better job at taking care of the basketball.”

One of Tech’s keys to the victory, according to Downey, was his team’s ability to put a shield around the paint and keep Harding senior guard Steven Barnett from penetrating into the paint.

“When we played at their place, we allowed Barnett to penetrate deep into the paint and that really hurt us,” the Tech coach said. “Tonight, I told them to shield the paint and don’t allow any penetration.”

Unlike Tech, who was playing just its second game of the tournament, Harding (18-12 on the season) was playing its third game in four days as they earned its semifinal berth thanks to its 60-53 win in quarterfinals on Friday over 12th-ranked Christian Brothers and that seemed to take a toll on the Bisons as the game progressed, according to Downey.

“I thought they (HU) looked tired at the end of the game,” Downey added. “But credit Harding and Coach Morgan, they never quit and played hard until the end.”

Junior guard **Brandon Friedel** (Victoria, Texas) recorded his second consecutive double-double of 22 points and a career-high 11 rebounds to pace the Wonder Boys, while sophomore guard **Laithe Massey** (Heber Springs, Ark.) tied his career-high 12

points. Senior forward **Troy Marcus** (Bronx, NY) added a double-double of 10 points and 10 rebounds in the win.

"Brandon hit some shots early and that was a big key for us," Downey said.

Tech led 36-30 at the half and held a 24-14 edge on the boards, but committed 13 turnovers that led to 16 Bison points.

Harding was paced by a game-high 23 points from Kevin Brown, while Trent Morgan added 14 points and Sam Brown scored 11 in the loss. Barnett finished with six points and 10 assists in his final college game.

Senior center **Thiago Cordeiro** (Recife, Brazil) reached a milestone tonight against Harding as he became the school's all-time leader in single-season with blocked shots with his rejection of a Morgan shot in the second half. Cordeiro, who blocked four shots on the night, has now blocked 79 shots in a season, bettering the old record of 76 held by former Wonder Boy **David Ross**. Ross set the record during the 1988-89 season.

For the game, Tech shot 43 percent from the field and 44 percent from the 3-point line. In addition, both teams combined for 68 free throws in the game as Tech was 20-for-35 (57 percent) from the line and Harding was 24-for-33 (73 percent) at the line, including going 15-for-22 at the line in the second half.

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