

ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

ATHLETICS

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GOLDEN SUNS SET TO OPEN GSC TOURNAMENT THURSDAY AGAINST VALDOSTA STATE

RUSSELLVILLE, Arkansas – With the regular season behind them, the next challenge awaiting the Arkansas Tech Golden Suns Basketball Team is the 2009 Gulf South Conference Tournament at the DeSoto County Civic Center in Southaven, Miss.

Tech, whose 19-8 overall record and 9-5 GSC West Division record earned them a bye in Wednesday's opening round and the No. 3 seed in the West Division, will take to the court on Thursday, March 5 against Valdosta State (20-7 overall, 9-3 GSC), the No. 2 seed from the East Division. Tip-off for Thursday's is set for 2:45 p.m. and will be the second of quarterfinal games.

"We're excited to get postseason play underway on Thursday," Golden Suns Head Coach **Dave Wilbers** said. "We have a challenge in front of us on Thursday against a very good Valdosta State team, but we'll be ready to play."

The Golden Suns are led by senior All-American forward **Amanda Grappe** (Benton, Ark.), who was named the GSC West Division Player of the Year by the league office earlier this week. The senior became just the second Golden Sun to be named Player of the Year as former Golden Sun **Heather Campbell** won the honor in 1996-97.

Grappe, who was a three-time First-Team All-GSC West Division selection, was second in the league in scoring at 18.9 points per game and is third in the league in rebounding at 8.1 rebounds per game. In addition, she is also fifth in the league in field goal percentage (53.5 percent), third in steals (2.4 spg) and 11th in free throw shooting (77.2 percent). On the season, Grappe has reached double figures in 26 of Tech's 27 games and has recorded nine double-doubles.

In addition to Grappe, other key performers for the Golden Suns are senior guard **Nikki Earles** (Huntsville, Ark.), who ranks second on the squad in scoring and rebounding, averaging 8.6 points and 5.4 rebounds per game, while freshman center **Taise Da Silva** (Americana, Brazil) led the conference in blocked shots, swatting 1.7 shots per game and junior guard **Ashley Grappe** (Benton, Ark.) was third in the league in assists, dishing out 5.2 assists per game and was second in steals, averaging 2.6 per game. The Golden Suns ranked second in the league and 15th nationally in field goal percentage as they shot 46.1 percent from the floor and are fourth in the league in scoring defense, allowing just 58.3 points per game.

Tech's quarterfinal round opponent, Valdosta State, is led by a pair of Second- Team All-GSC East Division selections in senior forward Brittany Hudson and junior guard Leschelle Matthews. On the season, Hudson averaged 9.4 points

and 7.6 rebounds per game, while Matthews netted 10.3 points and pulled down 3.4 boards per game. Junior guard Michelle Thompson led the Lady Blazers in scoring as she averaged 10.6 points per game and she was the league's best foul shooter, making 92.4 percent of her free throw attempts.

Tech, who is making its ninth appearance all-time and its third straight trip to the GSC Tournament, has posted a 17-6 record in the tournament all-time and has never lost prior to the tournament's championship. The Golden Suns are 2-6 all-time in the finals, including losing the past two seasons in the tournament final to Delta State. Tech won the GSC Tournament title in 1998 and 2003.

All the Golden Suns action in the GSC Tournament can be heard live on KWKK (100.9) FM or over the internet at <http://www.athletics.atu.edu>. A webcast (\$5.50 per game) of each game will be available at www.pennatlantic.com.

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