

ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

ATHLETICS

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GOLDEN SUNS FALL TO VALDOSTA STATE IN QUARTERFINALS OF 2009 GSC TOURNAMENT

SOUTHAVEN, Mississippi – Arkansas Tech Women’s Basketball opened up play here Thursday in the 2009 Gulf South Conference Tournament at the DeSoto County Civic Center with a 56-47 loss to Valdosta State in the second of four quarterfinal games.

With the loss, Tech now must wait out hope that its performance during the season will earn it a third consecutive berth in the NCAA Division II Tournament, which begins next weekend. In the latest NCAA D-II South Region poll that was released on Wednesday, the Golden Suns were ranked ninth. The NCAA Division II selection committee will unveil the 64 teams that qualify for this year’s NCAA Tournament on Sunday, March 8.

“We just have to wait until Sunday to see what the selection committee decides,” Golden Suns Head Coach **Dave Wilbers** said. “I think we’re one of the top 64 teams in Division II Basketball, but the selection doesn’t work like that.”

Tech, who fell to 19-9 overall on the season with the loss, couldn’t overcome a 16-5 run by the Lady Blazers over the final six-plus minutes of the game to suffer its first-ever loss in the first round of the GSC Tournament as Tech was 8-0 in first round games prior to Thursday’s loss.

“We lost the game ourselves. We had too many uncharacteristic turnovers today, especially down the stretch,” Wilbers said. “Plus, I thought we got out of our offense at times.”

Both teams opened the second half turning the ball three times apiece, before VSU (21-7 on the season) used a three-pointer by Michelle Thompson to extend its halftime lead to 29-20 with 17:54 left in the game. VSU led 26-20 at the half.

Following Thompson’s trey, the Golden Suns used an 8-2 run to tie the game at 31 following a three-pointer by senior All-American forward **Amanda Grappe** (Benton, Ark.). VSU, though, used an 8-3 run to take a 39-34 lead with 9:36 remaining.

Tech responded with a 10-3 run capped by another three-pointer from Grappe to push out to a 42-40 lead with 6:36 left in the game.

Grappe, who was named the GSC West Division Player of the Year on Monday, finished with a game-high 23 points and added nine rebounds. Grappe scored 18 of her 23 points in the second half. The 23 points moved Grappe within one point of former Golden Sun **Jennifer Richardson** (1994-98) for ninth place on the school’s career scoring list. Richardson scored 1,739 career points, while Grappe has scored 1,738 points in her Tech career.

"She (Amanda) deserves every bit of the honors she's received this season and in her career at Tech," the second-year Tech coach said. "She wanted the ball today. She has been a dream to coach both on and off the court."

Following Grappe's third of four treys for the game, the Golden Suns committed seven turnovers over the final six minutes of the contest that led to the Lady Blazers outscoring Tech, 16-5 to close the game's scoring. VSU finished the game hitting 5-of-6 free throws in the final minute to seal the victory.

"We turned the ball over too much and committed too many fouls today and VSU took advantage of those mistakes," Wilbers said.

Tech finished with 28 turnovers, which led to 30 VSU points and also committed 23 that led to the Lady Blazers shooting 21 free throws. VSU shot 71 percent (15-for-21) from the foul line and Tech shot 80 percent (12-for-15) from the line.

In addition to Grappe, freshman center **Taise Da Silva** (Americana, Brazil) added eight points and three blocks off the bench.

Thompson led VSU, who advances to the GSC Tournament semifinals for the second consecutive season, with 16 points, while Tamika Booker had 11 points and seven boards and Erin Keller added 10 points in the win.

For the game, Tech shot 37 percent from the field and 46 percent from the 3-point line, while VSU shot 35 percent from the floor and 33 percent from long distance. In addition, VSU held a 33-29 edge on the boards and had just 20 turnovers.

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