

ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

ATHLETICS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: November 18, 2005

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ARKANSAS TECH'S AOIFE COOKE SET TO RUN FOR A NATIONAL TITLE AT SATURDAY'S NCAA DIVISION II CROSS COUNTRY CHAMPIONSHIPS

POMONA, California – Arkansas Tech Golden Suns sophomore cross country runner **Aoife Cooke** (Youghal, Ireland) will look to continue to make history on Saturday as she runs at the 2005 NCAA Division II National Championship Meet hosted by Cal Poly Pomona and held at Prado Park in Chino, Calif. The 6K race is set to begin at 1 p.m. CST.

Cooke, who is Tech's first-ever NCAA regional champion in cross country and the school's first-ever qualifier for the NCAA National Championships, qualified for this year's NCAA Meet after winning the NCAA South Regional Meet nearly two weeks ago in Dade City, Fla. At the regional meet, Cooke ran a school-best 6K time of 21 minutes and 21 seconds to win by seven seconds over Tampa's Allison Macsas. Cooke is seeking to become Tech's first-ever individual NCAA national champion since the school joined the NCAA in 1996.

In addition to those accomplishments, Cooke also became Tech's first-ever Gulf South Conference individual cross country champion, as she won the GSC Championship Meet in a school-record 5K time of 17 minutes and 10 seconds.

"Aoife is an extraordinary young lady and is truly deserving of all the accolades she has earned," Tech Cross Country Coach **Tom Aspel** said. "Like any system, whether it be academics or athletics, she's kind of mastered it. I've seen a lot of athletes come through here over the years, and this is the best I've seen."

Cooke enters Saturday's NCAA Championship Meet with high expectations after running one of the eight fastest times during regionals.

"Aoife's times are right up there with the top runners in other parts of the country," the longtime Golden Suns coach said. "If she runs like she has been running since the beginning of the season, she has a shot at being near the front of the race."

Cooke said she is excited about Saturday's race and is confident she'll perform well.

"It feels really great. This is all so hard to believe," Cooke said. "I've been pleased all season with my performances, as I have beaten a lot of my own personal best times, plus, I feel really confident."

So far this season, Cooke was won five of the six meets she has competed in, including bettering the school-best mark five times. The only race she did not win was the Chile Pepper X-C Festival in Fayetteville, which featured most of the top runners in NCAA Division I. At the Chile Pepper, she was the third NCAA D-II runner to finish the meet as she ran a time of 21:41 to finish 34th overall. The 21:41 time set a new school 6K time, which was broken at the South Regional Championships.

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