

ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

ATHLETICS

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WONDER BOYS SCORE SEASON-HIGH 62 POINTS IN POSTING HOMECOMING VICTORY OVER WEST GEORGIA

RUSSELLVILLE, Arkansas – Arkansas Tech showed off its Gulf South Conference top-rated offense here Saturday night in front of 6,305 fans in Thone Stadium at Buerkle Field as the Wonder Boys posted season highs in points, passing yards and total yards in picking up a 62-30 Homecoming 2009 win over West Georgia.

Tech's offense, which entered the game averaging a GSC-best 483.2 yards per game and scoring 37.8 points per contest, scored on six of its nine first half possessions and finished the game scoring on nine of its 14 possessions enroute to scoring the most points in a game since tallying 61 points in a 61-28 win over Arkansas-Monticello in 1998.

"What a tremendous crowd tonight. So many people worked to make this homecoming weekend a special event for everyone at Arkansas Tech," Tech Head Football Coach and Athletic Director **Steve Mullins** said. "I don't get to see fireworks very often, so I really enjoyed that after our win. It was a great way to end a great homecoming weekend at Arkansas Tech."

The Wonder Boys, who are ranked 10th in the latest NCAA Division II Super Region Two poll, finished the game with a season-high 637 yards of offense, which is the second-best performance on offense by Tech during the Mullins era and Tech's three quarterbacks combined to go 30-for-40 through the air for a school record 475 yards, including senior **Nick Graziano** (Moraga, Calif.) going 27-for-37 passing for a school record 431 yards and threw a school-record tying six touchdown passes.

Graziano's 431 passing yards betters his old school mark of 403 set earlier this season against Arkansas-Monticello, while the six touchdown effort is the first since former Wonder Boy **Cole Barthel** tossed six touchdowns against West Georgia in 2007.

"We're looking at it like we're in the playoffs every week. If we lose, we are out. We've got to give ourselves a chance to get in by winning out, basically," said Graziano, the transfer from the University of Nevada and two-time GSC Offensive Player of the Week this season.

Tech (5-2 overall, 3-2 GSC) opened the game's scoring midway through the first quarter as Graziano connected with senior receiver **Frantz Simeon** (Belle Glade, Fla.) for a 6-yard touchdown pass.

Like Graziano, Simeon got into the Tech record books as well against the Wolves as he caught 10 passes for a school record 216 yards and also caught a school record four touchdown passes. The 216 receiving yards betters the old school mark of 207 set by **Alan King** against Missouri Southern in 1988, while the four touchdown receptions betters the old record of three most recently set by **Tracey Stiger** against Ouachita Baptist in 2007.

"It was a wonderful performance by Frantz and Nick tonight," Mullins said. "Of course, the (offensive line) protection was wonderful, too. The guys kept their intensity and kept their focus. The effort throughout the game was extremely good. It was a great result for us, and being able to pull out (our starters) in the third quarter is always pleasing, as we get ready for our next opponent."

Following Simeon's score, the Wolves (0-7 overall, 0-5 GSC) struck back as they drove 60 yards in nine plays and tied the game on a 14-yard touchdown pass from Sean Gray to Malcolm Johnson. The touchdown pass was the first of the season for Gray.

Tech increased its lead to 14-7 just a little under two minutes into the second quarter as junior **Cody Burns** (Pine Bluff, Ark.) scored on a 1-yard run. The lead grew to 20-7 on Tech's next possession as Graziano hit junior **Whisly Laurent** (Brooklyn, NY) for a 47-yard touchdown pass, but the extra point by senior kicker Travis Cockerham was blocked by UWG's Travis Payton.

UWG pulled within 20-10 on a 25-yard field goal by Adi Brkic with 7:39 left in the first half. Brkic's field goal came four plays after Trey Wilborn picked off a Graziano pass and returned 52 yards. The interception was Tech's lone turnover of the night.

The Wonder Boys, though, answered Brkic's field goal by driving 64 yards in three plays and completing the drive with a 65-yard touchdown pass from Graziano to Simeon. The 65-yard touchdown pass was Tech's longest scoring receiving touchdown of the season.

Tech pushed its lead to 34-10 following a 9-yard touchdown pass from Graziano to Simeon with 3:49 left in the half. The score came six plays after senior linebacker **Matt Kitchens** (Russellville, Ark.) recovered a fumble by UWG's V.J. Hunt.

UWG responded as they drove 52 yards in five plays, with the big play being a 52-yard pass from Gray to Matt O'Brien. That play set up a 25-yard field goal by Brkic with 3:09 left in the half.

The scoring wasn't done in the second period, though; as Tech drove 60 yards in three plays and pushed its lead to 41-13 following a 52-yard touchdown pass from Graziano to Simeon with 2:02 remaining.

Simeon had nine catches for 195 yards at halftime, while Graziano was 23-for-29 passing for 389 yards. Tech finished the first half with a 448 to 181 edge in total offensive yards. In the second quarter, both teams combined to score 40 points and gain 401 yards.

"It feels good, especially to set a record at home on homecoming." Simeon said. "We just tried to come out here and put on a show, and that's what we did."

The Wolves took the opening kickoff of the third quarter and marched 43 yards in eight plays and pulled within 41-20 following a 9-yard touchdown run by Brandon Behenna.

Tech, though, took its first possession of the second half and extended its lead to 48-20 following a 7-yard touchdown pass from Graziano to junior tight end **T.J. Langley** (Hugo, Okla.) in the back of the end zone.

UWG came back on its next possession and dropped Tech's lead to 48-23 following a 44-yard field goal by Brkic.

The Wonder Boys scored again early in the fourth quarter as redshirt freshman quarterback **Kevin Puckett** (Vilonia, Ark.) hooked up with redshirt freshman receiver **Lance Williams** (Vinita, Okla.) for an 18-yard touchdown to complete a 7-play, 59-

yard drive. The touchdown pass was Tech's seventh of the game, which set a new school record for single-game touchdown passes.

Tech found the end zone for the ninth and final time with 10:29 left in the game on a 1-yard run by redshirt freshman running back **Tavin Davis** (Memphis, Tenn.). Davis' run came six plays after junior linebacker **Tony Charles** (Sarasota, Fla.) recovered a Behenna fumble. For the game, Tech's defense forced three turnovers.

Davis finished the night with a team-best 11 carries for 52 yards, while senior **Tim Childress** (Batesville, Ark.) gained 42 yards rushing on eight carries. Junior receiver **Scharvundrick Franklin** (Dumas, Ark.) caught eight passes for 74 yards, while Laurent had three catches for 77 yards. Tech played without its leading receiver, senior **Landon Turner** (Destrehan, La.), who sat out the game due to an injury.

The Wolves completed the game's scoring on an 8-yard pass from Behenna to George Summerset to complete an 11-play, 92-yard drive.

"When you look at the negatives, our kickoff coverage was very hot and cold, and several of the scores, like 17 of their points, came on a short field because our kickoff cover unit did not do as well as they should have," the 13th-year Tech coach said. "Of course, defensively, it's our job to stop them, too. I was disappointed in how we played defensively. I don't care, when you get in, you've got to perform. I know we had some guys, particularly on the last drive, when it's your turn, you've got to step up and give effort."

Tech allowed the Wolves to return eight kicks for 131 yards, including a 50-yard return by Johnson to open the third quarter.

For the game, UWG's offense scored a season high 30 points and gained 352 yards, including passing for a season-high 217 yards. Gray was 7-for-22 passing for 124 yards, while Behenna went 5-for-9 passing for 93 yards.

Johnson caught four passes for 92 yards and gained 188 all-purpose yards in the loss.

Tech will return to action next Saturday, Oct. 24, when the Wonder Boys travel to Arkadelphia, Ark., to face Henderson State in an important GSC match-up. Kickoff is set for 3 p.m. at Carpenter-Haygood Stadium and the game will mark homecoming on HSU's campus.

"We've got to be ready. Henderson is fighting for something, we are fighting for something," Mullins said. "Hopefully we can go down there and have a good game."

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