

ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

ATHLETICS

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WONDER BOYS FOOTBALL SET TO OPEN SPRING FOOTBALL PRACTICE THURSDAY

RUSSELLVILLE, Arkansas – Arkansas Tech Football is set to open its run of 15 spring practices with a non-pad workout Thursday at Buerkle Field.

The Wonder Boys are set to open spring drills with some 90 players, two new coaches and a new offensive and defensive scheme.

"In my nine years here at Tech, this is the most excited I've been about starting spring football drills," Wonder Boys Head Football Coach and Athletic Director **Steve Mullins** said. "We have a bunch of goals and objectives for this spring season, among them is implementing a new offensive and defensive scheme and finding a quarterback to replace Jason Campbell."

One of the hotly contested battles in the spring will be at quarterback where Mullins must replace two-year starter **Jason Campbell**, whose eligibility expired at the end of last season. Among those competing for the starting quarterback spot are redshirt sophomore **Justin Ray** (Benton, Ark.) and sophomore **Cole Barthel** (Decatur, Ala.), a transfer from the University of Arkansas. Also in the mix is freshman **Bubba Noakes** (Ola, Ark.), who redshirted this past season.

"We're making a change offensively this coming season to be able to take advantage of our quarterbacks athletic ability," Mullins said. "Both Justin and Cole are good athletes and should fit into a new scheme well."

Mullins said that Noakes, who is listed as a wide receiver on the team roster, is taking snaps at quarterback in the spring because of an ankle injury suffered by Ray playing intramural basketball during the off season.

"I expect that Justin will be limited in our first three practices, but he shouldn't miss an extended period of spring drills," the ninth-year Tech coach said. "He is rehabbing well and is making progress daily."

In addition to quarterbacks, Mullins said that his team lost several starters on both offensive and defensive lines, which is also going to be a focus point during workouts.

"There are so many things up in the air this spring with our team and there will be battles on all sides of the ball for starting positions," said Mullins.

Mullins said that in his 26 years of coaching football he has never seen this many open spots on a team in spring drills.

"It is going to be an exciting time for myself and the coaches," Mullins said. "It will be interesting to see how things shake out as these next 15 practices proceed."

At the end of last season, Mullins added two new coaches and restructured his staff. **Benyard Jones** (defensive line) and **Greg Williams** (defensive backs) were hired as assistants to replace **Kurt Corbin** (receivers) and **Derrick LeBlanc** (defensive line), who both left for assistant coaching positions at NCAA Division I-AA

schools. In addition, Mullins moved **Clint Reed** from linebackers to offensive line, **Ryan Wallace** from running backs to receivers, defensive coordinator **David Wheeler** moved from the secondary to linebackers and offensive coordinator **Gregg Ricono** will not only coach the quarterbacks, but also the running backs.

Another area Mullins is looking for in the spring is leadership as his team lost a lot of senior leaders from last season's 7-3 team that finished 6-3 in the Gulf South Conference.

"Over the years we have had strong leadership from the upperclassmen, but were looking for anyone to step forward and provide some leadership," the coach said. "It might be a redshirt freshman that steps forward and provides that leadership, but we need to find some leaders for our team."

Prior to going on spring break last week, the players had four days of testing, which produced exciting results, according to Mullins.

"Our testing yielded a lot of impressive and encouraging results and I was pleased by that," the Tech coach added.

Since Monday, the coaching staff has been holding conditioning workouts for the team at 6 a.m.

"We've been trying to run the spring break out of our players," Mullins said. "I hope our players are ready to step on the field and get after it beginning on Thursday."

The Wonder Boys will conclude spring ball with the annual 'Senior Bowl' on Tuesday, April 25. The Senior Bowl is scheduled to begin at 5 p.m. at Buerkle Field. In addition to the Senior Bowl, Tech will also conduct scrimmages on Thursday, April 13 at 3:30 p.m. and will have its Green and Gold Spring Scrimmage on Saturday, April 22 at 9:30 a.m.

Listed below are the dates of all 15 of Tech's spring football practices.

Thursday, March 30 – 3:30 p.m. (non-pad)

Friday, March 31 – 3:30 p.m. (non-pad)

Saturday, April 1 – 9 a.m. (non-tackle)

Monday, April 3 – 3:30 p.m. (non-tackle)

Wednesday, April 5 – 3:30 p.m. (tackle)

Friday, April 7 – 3:30 p.m. (tackle)

Monday, April 10 – 3:30 p.m. (tackle)

Wednesday, April 12 – 3:30 p.m. (non-tackle)

Thursday, April 13 – Scrimmage #1 - 3:30 p.m.

Monday, April 17 – 3:30 p.m. (tackle)

Wednesday, April 19 – 3:30 p.m. (tackle)

Thursday, April 20 – 3:30 p.m. (non-tackle)

Friday, April 21 – Link-It-Up Golf Outing at Chamberlyne Country Club

Saturday, April 22 – Green and Gold Game – 9:30 a.m.

Monday, April 24 – 3:30 p.m. (non-pad)

Tuesday, April 25 – Senior Bowl – 5 p.m.

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