

ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

ATHLETICS

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TECH CONDUCTS ITS FIRST SCRIMMAGE OF SPRING FOOTBALL PRACTICE

RUSSELLVILLE, Arkansas – Arkansas Tech Football conducted its first of three spring scrimmages here on a hot and steamy Thursday afternoon at Buerkle Field.

Tech Head Football Coach **Steve Mullins** was pleased by his team's effort at the scrimmage under the circumstances of playing with its top two quarterbacks due to injuries.

"I thought things went well today when you consider the circumstances of having to practice without our top two quarterbacks," Mullins said. "In addition to that, it was the hottest day so far of spring practice and that tends to affect the players."

The scrimmage featured 90 plays and Mullins liked the pace of the scrimmage.

"I thought the pace of the scrimmage was great and it really tested our players," the 10th-year Wonder Boy coach said.

During the spring, the Wonder Boys have been implementing a new offensive and defensive scheme.

On offense, Tech showed a drastic difference from last season as they spread the field and had a lot of misdirection and run-pass option capabilities, but the offense's development has been slowed this spring due to injuries to sophomore quarterbacks **Cole Barthel** (Decatur, Ala.) and **Justin Ray** (Benton, Ark.). Barthel is a transfer from the University of Arkansas.

Barthel injured his knee in the team's third workout of the spring, while Ray hasn't fully recovered from a sprained ankle suffered during the offseason playing intramural basketball. Redshirt freshman **Bubba Noakes** (Ola, Ark.), who was moved to quarterback at the start of spring drills, missed several days due to an injury but has now returned to practice.

"I thought our offense took some steps today and played well at times, especially Noakes and C.J. Hunter who have been asked to fill in at quarterback," said Mullins.

Redshirt freshman **C.J. Hunter** (West Helena, Ark.), who came to Tech as a wide receiver last year, was moved to quarterback just three practices ago and performed well in Thursday's scrimmage, according to Mullins.

"I'm proud of the way C.J. performed today, despite the fact he's only been playing quarterback for three practices," Mullins added. "Plus, I thought Bubba did a good job today running the offense."

While the offense is still a work in progress with the absence of its top two quarterbacks, the Wonder Boys defense also performed well today in its new 3-4 alignment.

"I thought our defense chased and pursued the ball well this afternoon," the Tech coach said. "I was pleased with the fact that our defense was able to hold up with the offense's pace, because our offensive style tends to wear down defenses."

In addition to working on both offense and defense, Mullins said the team worked on special teams, including beginning the scrimmage with punting and punt coverage. The Wonder Boys need to find a replacement for both its kicker (Mark Ewersmann) and punter (Glenn Wilson) from last season as they both were seniors.

"Our special teams did a good job today, we had only a couple of breakdowns in coverage, so that was pleasing," Mullins said. "I thought Nick McCaskill punted extremely well."

Mullins said his team will now take three days off for the Easter holiday weekend and will return to practice on Monday with a 3:30 p.m. workout. The Wonder Boys will hold its Green and Gold Scrimmage next Saturday, April 22 at 9:30 a.m. and then conclude spring drills with the Senior Bowl on Tuesday, April 25 at 4:30 p.m.

Other ATU Football News –

* - On Thursday, one day after releasing his team's 2006 season schedule, Mullins announced that the game time for Tech's Gulf South Conference game on Sept. 23 at Valdosta State had been changed from 6 p.m. to 12 p.m.

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