

ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

ATHLETICS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 27, 2006
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ARKANSAS TECH'S AOIFE COOKE EARNS PRESTIGIOUS GULF SOUTH CONFERENCE TOP TEN AWARD

RUSSELLVILLE, Arkansas – Arkansas Tech Golden Suns Cross Country runner **Aoife Cooke** has been named as one of the Gulf South Conference's "Top Ten" student-athletes for the 2005-06 school year.

Cooke's award marks the ninth time in last 10 years that at least one Arkansas Tech student-athlete has been selected as a member of the GSC "Top 10" and she is Tech's 12th representative on the prestigious list since 1997.

The GSC "Top Ten" recognizes the top five male and female student-athletes as the cream of the crop in the conference, which consisted of 17 member institutions and about 3,300 student-athletes this past school year. The top male and female student-athletes in the league receive the prestigious Commissioner's Trophy.

The presentations of this year's winners will be made at the GSC's Annual Awards Banquet on Thursday, June 29, at the Hilton Garden Inn in Pensacola Beach, Fla., at 6:30 p.m. In addition to honoring the "Top Ten" honorees, the conference will announce the winners of the Commissioner's Trophies, recognize its All-Sports Trophy champions and bid farewell to two departing administrators: University of Montevallo President Dr. Robert McChesney and West Alabama Athletic Director Dee Outlaw.

The selections for the "Top Ten" award were made by a panel of administrators from within the Gulf South Conference. The panel selects whom it feels are the five most outstanding males and five most outstanding females based on athletic, academic and extracurricular achievement during the 2005-06 academic year.

Tech's GSC "Top Ten" Honorees

1997 – Bryant Richardson (Baseball)

1998 – *David Ciesla (Baseball)*

1999 – Stuart Cash (Football)
Jamie Hatchett (Volleyball)

2000 – Stuart Cash (Football)
Bridget Pyles (Volleyball)

2001 – *Paul Peletz (Football)*
Bridget Pyles (Volleyball)

2002 – B.J. Bayer (Football)

2004 – Jonathan Hayes (Football)

2005 – *Jonathan Hayes (Football)*

2006 – Aoife Cooke (Cross Country)

Bold/Italics indicates Tech's GSC Commissioner's Trophy winners

Cooke, a sophomore from Youghal, Ireland, became Tech's first-ever NCAA Division II Cross Country All-American this past fall when she finished ninth at the NCAA Division II Cross Country Championships. In addition, Cooke became the school's first-ever GSC Cross Country champion and she also was the school's first-ever NCAA South Regional Cross Country champion.

In addition to her athletic accolades, Cooke, who carries a 3.76 cumulative grade point average in biology, was a member of the GSC All-Academic Cross Country team, an *ESPN The Magazine* Academic All-District VI selection and an NCAA Division II USTFCCA Academic All-American.

In addition to Cooke, five other female student-athletes earned honors this season. They are North Alabama senior volleyball player Vanessa Ferretti, Delta State senior softball player Alyse Hasty, Alabama-Huntsville junior softball player Stephanie Pinto and Christian Brothers junior volleyball player Laura Washington. Hasty and Pinto are repeat "Top Ten" selections from last season.

The five male student-athletes selected were Central Arkansas senior football player Cory Cangelosi, Christian Brothers senior baseball player John Raymond Hehn, West Florida senior cross country runner Michael Padilla, North Alabama junior baseball player James Barksdale and Lincoln Memorial junior soccer player Diogo Silvy.

A Tech female student-athlete has now been named to the female top five for the fourth time since 1997 and the first one since former Golden Sun volleyball player **Bridget Pyles** (Mansfield, Ark.) in 2001. Pyles was a two-time "Top Ten" honoree. Tech's first female student-athlete named to the GSC's "Top Ten" was former Golden Sun volleyball player **Jamie Hatchett** (Fort Smith, Ark.) in 1999.

In addition to the four female student-athletes named GSC "Top Ten" honorees, Tech has had eight male student-athletes honored since former Wonder Boy baseball player **Bryant Richardson** (Russellville, Ark.) began the tradition in 1997. Former Wonder Boy baseball player **David Ciesla** (Pottsville, Ark.) was honored in 1998, while football players **Stuart Cash** (Lonoke, Ark.), **Paul Peletz** (Bentonville, Ark.) and **B.J. Bayer** (Gentry, Ark.) have also been honored. Cash was a two-time selection in 1999 and 2000, while Peletz was named in 2001 and Bayer was selected in 2002. Former Wonder Boy football player **Jonathan Hayes** (Sheridan, Ark.) was the most recent Tech male student-athlete honored as he was a two-time GSC "Top Ten" honoree in 2004 and 2005 and was selected as the league's Commissioner's Trophy winner in 2005.

Cooke is active on the Tech campus in non-athletic extra-curricular activities as she works as a resident assistant at Caraway Hall and was named as the Resident Assistant of the Year this past school year and also is an active member of Tech's SAAC (Student-Athlete Advisory Committee). In addition, she has been involved in many cultural and social programs put on by Tech's International Multicultural Office and have served on the Wesley Foundation's Cross Culture Ministry team, which is a program that conducts activities for international students and helps them to learn English through interactive lessons.

As a resident assistant at Caraway Hall, which is an all women's dorm on the Tech campus, Cooke has helped put on international/cultural programs for the students in the dorm. Some of those programs have ranged from an Irish Night, a Chinese New Year, Albania Night and Black History celebration. For each of these

programs, people of those various cultures/nationalities helped cook food and taught everyone involved about their culture.

Tech Head Cross Country Coach **Tom Aspel** says that Cooke has inspired her teammates to improve.

"Aoife's accomplishments give her young teammates more defined goals to set and accomplish," Aspel said in Cooke's nomination form. "I can tell these things are happening just from the way they (her teammates) talk about training and goal setting and all of this is a direct result from the leadership standards Aoife Cooke has set."

The daughter of Kathleen and Noel Cooke, she is a 2004 honors graduate from Colaiste Choilm School in Corke, Ireland. This past December, Cooke competed for Ireland in the European Cross Country Championships.

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