

ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

ATHLETICS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 19, 2006

Contact: Ben Greenberg, SID (479) 968-0645

TECH FOOTBALL BATTLES HEAT IN SATURDAY'S 90-PLAY SCRIMMAGE

RUSSELLVILLE, Arkansas – Arkansas Tech Football conducted its first major scrimmage of the 2006 season here Saturday afternoon at Buerkle Field in temperatures that hovered around 100 degrees in the Arkansas River Valley.

The scrimmage featured 90 plays, including several 10-play sequences involving the Wonder Boys No. 1 offense going up against Tech's top defensive unit. In addition, the beginning portion of the scrimmage featured live punting and punt returning.

"Today's scrimmage was a work in progress for our team," Tech Head Football Coach **Steve Mullins** said after a long pause. "We had way too many mental errors and bonehead plays after having 10 days of practice, so that was disappointing."

Mullins said that some of the mental errors might have come from the football players spending Saturday morning helping their fellow Tech students move into their dorms for the upcoming school year.

"They worked their butt off helping people move in today, but once they hit the field, they weren't as sharp mentally as they needed to be," the Tech coach said.

One area Mullins was pleased with was the kicking of redshirt freshman **Travis Cockerham** (Bryant, Ark.). Cockerham, who connected on a 47-yard field goal and was 2-for-2 in extra points in Saturday's scrimmage, is the top choice to replace the departed **Mark Ewersmann** as the Wonder Boys kicker this season.

"Travis really stepped up today and kicked well and I was pleased by that," said Mullins, the 10th-year Tech coach.

In addition to praising the game of Cockerham, Mullins said he thought his team's defensive intensity was better than the offense's intensity.

"Our defense really played with a lot of intensity and were able to get in some full-speed tackling today," Mullins added.

Among the offensive highlights of the scrimmage was a 58-yard touchdown reception by sophomore W-back **Tracey Stiger** (Russellville, Ark.) from sophomore quarterback **Cole Barthel** (Decatur, Ala.). Barthel, who missed all of spring practice due to a knee injury suffered in a non-contact drill, was cleared on Friday by Tech's doctors for full contact after having ACL surgery in the spring. In addition to Stiger's long touchdown reception, redshirt freshman tailback **Tim Childress** (Batesville, Ark.) had a 53-yard touchdown run, redshirt freshman receiver **Luther**

Steaurt (Prescott, Ark.) had a 68-yard reception and freshman tailback **Xavier Murry** (West Memphis, Ark.) had a 49-yard run late in the scrimmage.

In addition to touchdowns by Stiger and Childress, the other scores in the scrimmage came on a one-yard touchdown run by junior tailback **R.J. Vanhook** (Prescott, Ark.) and a 65-yard interception return by sophomore rover **Jamal Johnson** (New Orleans, La.)

"I thought our quarterbacks had a lot of mental mistakes and made some poor reads, but it wasn't their entire fault," Mullins said.

Mullins said that his initial impression without looking at the film was that he was disappointed in the play of Tech's receivers.

"The receivers didn't run the correct routes, dropped balls and didn't perform very well, which hindered our offense's ability to move the ball," Mullins added.

The Wonder Boys return two starting receivers in seniors **Mark Caldwell** (Crossett, Ark.) and **Josh Rogers** (Russellville, Ark.) from last season's team and several other receivers saw significant action last season.

On the afternoon, Tech's six quarterbacks that played combined to go 10-for-32 through the air for 193 yards with one touchdown and one interception. Barthel finished the scrimmage 4-for-9 passing for 87 yards and the lone passing touchdown.

In addition to Barthel, sophomore **Justin Ray** (Benton, Ark.), who was the back-up to last season's starter **Jason Campbell**, took snaps with the first-team offense on Saturday. Ray, like Barthel, missed all of spring drills due to an ankle injury suffered playing intramural basketball. Ray finished the afternoon 2-for-10 through the air for 28 yards.

Mullins said he is still unsure who will start under center for the team's opener on Aug. 31, but he hopes to have a starting quarterback named within the next week.

"We expect to name a starting quarterback named by Thursday or Friday of this coming week," Mullins said. "Now that our quarterback injury situation has been cleared up, we can now evaluate them in competition over the next couple of days."

While the offense gained 193 yards passing, Tech's running game accounted for 227 yards on 43 carries in the scrimmage, with Murry leading the way with 62 yards on four carries and Childress running for 58 yards on two carries.

"Our running game was average today, as the running backs made some poor reads and our quarterbacks made some poor pitches," said Mullins.

Mullins said that he was also pleased his team made it through the scrimmage without any major injuries. While there weren't any injuries, Tech's offensive line was missing two starters as senior right guard **Blake Hoskinson** (Osceola, Ark.) and sophomore left tackle **Shannon Dixon** (Tiller, Ark.) missed the scrimmage due to family issues.

The Wonder Boys will hold their final scrimmage before the season opener on Aug. 31 sometime next week, but Mullins said that a time, date and venue for the second scrimmage hasn't been determined.

Tech will open its 2006 season on Thursday, Aug. 31 when they face off against Northeastern [OK] State. Kickoff is set for 7 p.m. at Russellville High School's Cyclone Stadium.

Scoring Summary

Green - Tracey Stiger 58 yard pass from Cole Barthel (Travis Cockerham kick)

Green - Cockerham 47-yard field goal

Green - Tim Childress 53-yard run (Cockerham kick)

Green - R.J. Vanhook 1-yard run (kick failed)

White - Jamal Johnson 65-yard interception return (Michael Podobnik kick)

Individual Statistics

RUSHING - Earnie Childress 6-14; Antonio McCoy 5-13; Xavier Murry 4-62; R.J. Vanhook 4-11; Gabe Albeik 4-7; Josh Langley 3-19; Tracey Stiger 3-16; Justin Ray 3-(-5); Shaun O'Connor, Jr. 3-2; Tim Childress 2-58; Chris Vaughn 2-23; Chris Gunter 2-7; Ben Johnson 1-0. **Total - 43-227 yards**

PASSING - Cole Barthel 4-9-0-1 87; Justin Ray 2-10-0-0 28; Josh Langley 2-6-0-0 10; Ben Johnson 2-7-0-0 68. **Total - 10-32-1-1 193.**

RECEIVING - Tracey Stiger 2-59; Mark Caldwell 2-35; Luther Stueart 1-68; Justin McCutcheon 1-21; Major Baker 1-8; Shaun O'Connor, Jr. 1-5; Earnie Childress 1-2; Bubba Noakes 1-0.

INTERCEPTIONS - Jamal Johnson 1-65.

-- Tech Athletics --