

ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

ATHLETICS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 24, 2006

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

ARKANSAS TECH VOLLEYBALL SET TO OPEN SEASON THIS WEEKEND BY HOSTING ITS OWN TOURNAMENT

RUSSELLVILLE, Arkansas – Arkansas Tech Volleyball is set to open up the 2006 season this weekend when it welcomes four teams to Tucker Coliseum for the second annual Golden Suns Spikefest.

This weekend's season opening tournament will begin Friday at 11 a.m. and continue through Saturday night with five matches each day.

In addition to Tech, the tournament will feature Fort Valley State, Texas A&M-Commerce, Washburn and Drury.

The Golden Suns will open the tournament at 1 p.m. Friday against Fort Valley State, before finishing the first day of competition with a 7 p.m. match against Texas A&M-Commerce. On Saturday, Tech will open the day against 7th-ranked Washburn at 11 a.m. and conclude the tournament at 5 p.m. against Drury.

"We are excited to finally play someone else other than ourselves," Tech Head Volleyball Coach **Kristy Kale** said. "This year's tournament field is very strong. Washburn is a national power, while the other three teams will also be tough. It should be a fun two days of volleyball and I encourage everyone to come out and watch."

Kale's third Golden Suns team feature five returning starters and eight letterwinners from last season's 25-12 squad that went 9-5 and finished second in the Gulf South Conference West Division. In addition to the eight returners, Kale welcomes seven freshmen to this season's roster. Kale's 2006 team does not feature a senior and has only two juniors.

"We have a very balanced team this year and that will provide us with a lot of depth and versatility," Kale said. "Despite having five starters back, we're still a young team in some aspects of the game."

Among the key returners is sophomore setter **Kayla Allison** (Tulsa, Okla.). Allison, who was a Preseason All-GSC West Division selection after earning Second-Team All-GSC honors last season, led Tech with 1,465 assists (10.77 apg) and recorded 322 digs (2.37 dpg) and 44 service aces. The 1,465 assists was second on the school's single-season assist chart and she also had 13 double-doubles and had 11 matches with at least 50 assists.

Other key returners include junior right side hitter **Rebecca Baker** (Byron Center, Mich.), sophomore outside hitter **Racheal Urquhart** (Chatham, Ont.) and sophomore middle blocker **Dana Florian** (Wilmington, Ill.). Baker averaged 2.41 kills and 3.37 digs per game last season, while Urquhart averaged 2.70 kills, 3.76 digs and recorded a team-high 55 aces and Florian had a team-best 139 total blocks (1.02 bpg), including 25 solo blocks.

"Our returning players gained a lot of game experience this season and I'm expecting a lot more out of them this year," said Kale.

Kale said that she expects five her seven freshmen to play this season, including Russellville natives **Katie Coulter** (middle blocker) and **Kirsten Boyd** (outside hitter).

"Our freshmen have really come in and stepped up and made the adjustment to college volleyball," Kale said.

Following this weekend's Golden Suns Spikefest, Tech will hit the road to begin a stretch of 11 matches away from home with a 6 p.m. match Tuesday in Joplin, Mo., against Missouri Southern.

Here is a capsule look at the other four Golden Suns Spikefest teams:

Fort Valley State – The Wildcats enter the 2006 season looking to improve upon last season's 9-25 team. The Wildcats have only 10 players on their roster and returning three starters and six letterwinners from last season's team. Among the key returners is senior outside hitter Debroah Jones, who averaged 4.31 kills, 1.62 digs and 1.13 blocks per game last season. Fort Valley State, along with Tech, is the only returning team from last season's tournament field.

Texas A&M-Commerce – The Lady Lions return four starters and four letterwinners from last season's 10-19 squad. Among their key returners is senior outside hitter Jane Latu. Latu averaged 3.69 kills and 1.40 digs per game last season. During the offseason, TAMU-Commerce third-year head coach Gwen Weatherford added nine newcomers, including five junior college transfers.

Washburn – Washburn enters the 2006 season looking to repeat their success from 2005 as they went 35-3 and finished the season with a No. 10 national ranking after losing in the second round of the NCAA Tournament. The Lady Blues, who are ranked 7th in the preseason CSTV/AVCA Division II Coaches Poll, return all six starters and 13 letterwinners. Among the key returners are junior All-Americans, Monica Meisner (outside hitter) and junior Tessa Jones (middle hitter). Meisner averaged 3.85 kills and hit .274 last season, while Jones averaged 3.58 kills and hit .285.

Drury – The Panthers have high hopes this season on improving on last year's 12-18 record as they return five starters and 10 letterwinners for third-year head coach Amy Gardner. Among the key returners for Drury is senior libero Maggie Thompson, who recorded 578 digs (5.72 dpg) and 26 service aces and earned Honorable Mention All-GLVC honors.

Golden Suns Spikefest Schedule

Friday, August 25

11 a.m. Washburn vs. Drury

1 p.m. Arkansas Tech vs. Fort Valley State

3 p.m. Texas A&M-Commerce vs. Washburn

5 p.m. Drury vs. Fort Valley State

7 p.m. Arkansas Tech vs. Texas A&M-Commerce

Saturday, August 26

9 a.m. Fort Valley State vs. Texas A&M-Commerce

11 a.m. Arkansas Tech vs. Washburn

1 p.m. Texas A&M-Commerce vs. Drury

3 p.m. Fort Valley State vs. Washburn

5 p.m. Arkansas Tech vs. Drury