Rugby set to host Lindenwood in season opener

Players buying into the program as expectations are high

BRAD BREWER

SPORTS WRITER

Curt Huckaby Field has action headed its way soon as Arkansas State's marquee rugby squad is gearing up for another crack at the D1A National Championship.

Last season ended in disappointment as the Red Wolves fell in the quarterfinals of the national tournament to Lindenwood. Junior Dale Hartmann recounts the 2019 season from its strong start to its unfortunate ending.

"We started off great," Hartmann said. "We played great in our first game back against Lindenwood. Against Life, we didn't play bad at all. Some small mistakes cost us the game and they're the number one team in the country so we we're staying positive. At the end of the day, I just think it was a lack of focus towards the end of the year. We lost in the quarterfinals and I can tell you that we aren't happy. We're coming back for revenge."

Echoing the inspired sentiments from his teammate, junior George Sharpe is optimistic coming into this season, believing the team is more locked in than ever before with great leadership as their foundation.

"This year especially I feel like we have a great team," Sharpe said. "We have a core group of leaders that are getting the right message out while last year was a bit all over the place. Obviously it's rugby so injuries are going to happen, and we had a few last year. We didn't have a trainer at one point so we were going out around trying to fix our bodies by ourselves."

Hartmann followed up on Sharpe's statement, claiming that this year more than ever, the individuals on the team are buying in.

"The guys are buying into the program," Hartmann said. "We had a lot of guys that were giving a lot of effort, but some guys weren't. Now I feel like 95% of the guys are actually buying in and the guys that don't buy in are falling to the side. And it's not like we don't want to be inclusive, but it's a competitive sport. We also have a depth chart which means no one is complacent."

That depth chart has become a critical beacon of motivation for the players as now there is a level of uncertainty over who is put on the field and who is not.

"There is no set starting position at all," Sharpe said. "The coaches said the other day that it's up for grabs. It can change every week."

While the future on the field is strong, the team has to fight many of its own battles when it comes to funding their squad, and last year's contest at Centennial Bank Stadium against the University of Arkansas became a great catalyst for the future of the program.

"It was huge to us guys," Sharpe said. "To be able to play in the stadium and get that opportunity from the school, that was really nice of them to let us have the honor of playing there. Not everyone gets to do that."

Even though the Razorbacks were not the toughest competition for the Red Wolves, the team was laser focused on the match and were surprised at how much support they received.

"We didn't have to take it that seriously, but we did," Hartmann said. "Our coach said it was a great opportunity for us to get support and the stadium filled out a lot more than we expected and that was pretty awesome. I actually get goosebumps thinking about playing there."

That support from the community is vital to the program, and the team is not stopping at one game at Centennial Bank Stadium. Every day the players are spreading the word of their team in order to garner attention for their incredible work.

"We want to carry on that tradition," Hartmann said. "We are trying to get whatever support that we can. Whether it's donations or just getting the good name out there, that's the only way we are going to be able to improve the program and our facilities. I wouldn't say our facilities are terrible, but they are not up to standards in terms of other top universities. And in terms of recruiting that would help a lot."

At the end of the day, the greatest thing to players like Sharpe and Hartmann is what rugby brings to them off the field by bringing people together and becoming better men.

"We want to leave a legacy," Hartmann said. "Everyone is trying to be a better person. You're not just here to go out and play rugby. You come here to meet people and exchange cultures and that's the best thing about the rugby team. We have so many different cultures and promoting that is super cool. We are intermingling with people more. We are helping with sororities and that's something that I never thought we would do and when I first got here we weren't doing that."

All the work is paying off, and Arkansas State rugby has more attention than ever before. And while the team has worked hard for the support, they are nothing but grateful for everything they have received.

"We have a lot more people asking about it," Hartmann said. "We are getting more involved with the school and the students. SAB (Student Activities Board) has helped us out a lot and we want to thank everybody for their support. We do really want you guys to hold us up to a high standard because we aren't here to just be another team that's competing. We want to win national championships. It's a pride and we want to give back to the program."



COURTESY OF ARKANSAS STATE RUGBY

Dale Hartmann motions towards his teammate in the Red Wolves' 99-0 victory over the University of Arkansas November 9, 2019. A-State rugby opens its season Saturday at home against Lindenwood.

Men's and women's basketball set for Sun Belt Conference road trips

KRISHNAN COLLINS

SPORTS EDITOR

Both Arkansas State basketball teams are set to play in important Sun Belt Conference road games. However, both teams are coming off significantly different results in their last SBC matchups.

Women's basketball (9-11 overall, 6-3 SBC) rides a two game win streak including a home win over one of the best teams in the SBC, Coastal Carolina, and a one point away win at Louisiana-Monroe. For a full game recap, including post game quotes, of A-State's win over Coastal Carolina, head to The Herald's website.

The Red Wolves sit sixth in a tightly compacted SBC league table. Three teams, including Louisiana, UT-Arlington and the Red Wolves boast a 6-3 record. Coastal Carolina and Little Rock round out second and third in the standings each having a 7-2 record in the league. Troy sits first in the conference with an 8-1 SBC record.

Thursday, A-State travels to Georgia State before taking on Georgia Southern Saturday. The Red Wolves have a very real chance of winning both of these games on the road as A-State beat both programs in Jonesboro earlier in the season.

When Georgia State (4-16 overall, 1-8 SBC) came to the First National Bank Arena in January, it took a big fourth quarter comeback and 21 points from Morgan Wallace for the Red Wolves to take down the Panthers in overtime. Since that matchup, the Panthers have lost all of their league games by at least 14 points.

The only potential problems for A-State could be prolific scorers Taylor Henderson and Taylor Hosendove.

Each player averages 10 and 10.7 points per game respectively.

Hosendove's points per game is good for 20th best in the league, but A-State should have the edge over the Panthers. Tip off is set for Thursday at 5 p.m. CST.

Georgia Southern (6-14 overall, 3-6 SBC) heads into the matchup with A-State on a two-game losing streak.

BASKETBALL, 4A



Photo by: Krishnan Collins | Sports Editor

J.J. Matthews looks for an outlet pass in the Red Wolves' 83-77 loss to Coastal Carolina. A-State heads to in-state rival Little Rock Saturday.