

Big names and local rival headline 2020 Football Schedule

Red Wolves face key matchups on the road

BRAD BREWER
SPORTS EDITOR

2020 is set to be a challenging year for Arkansas State football, with multiple matchups against top-25 teams and the two Sun Belt finalists from the past two years will host the Red Wolves in conference play. The campaign for the first Sun Belt championship since 2016 will be the toughest one yet.

The season will open September 5 at the Liberty Bowl in Memphis as an old rivalry will become renewed. Unfortunately for A-State, the differential between quality of the two teams is larger than what the Red Wolves would have hoped for. The Tigers are ranked 17th in the nation according to the Associated Press' poll, and are fresh off its first American Conference championship victory in seven years. Senior quarterback Brady White is returning for one last year in Memphis after throwing for over 4000 yards in 2019, and Kenneth Gainwell who ran for almost 1,500 yards in his freshman year will cause numerous problems for A-State's defense. It will be a shootout, but not one that the Red Wolves can more than likely keep up with.

After the duel from down the road, the Red Wolves will kickoff for the first time at Centennial Bank Stadium by hosting Howard. The Bison from the nation's Capital should be the first win for Arkansas State, as Howard failed to pull a single top-25 vote in the final FCS standings of the 2019

season. All eyes will then shift to Ann Arbor as for the second time in three weeks, the Red Wolves will go on the road to face a top-25 team.

Michigan is currently ranked 18th in the nation by the Associated Press, and should have fire in their eyes after last season's Big Ten championship race got away from them, followed by a beating at the hands of Alabama in the Citrus Bowl. However, with no options for an experienced starting quarterback for the Wolverines and a team that has been plagued by losing games as the favorites, there is more upset potential here for the Red Wolves than in Memphis.

The Red Wolves will then close non-conference play out against Tulsa at home which should be an even battle as the Golden Hurricane are a middle of the pack team at best in the American Conference after finishing 2019 with a 2-6 conference record. Expect a closer game here and another shootout as Tulsa's defense was sheepish for the entirety of last season.

Into conference play, the Red Wolves will start things out by travelling to Coastal Carolina at the beginning of October. A-State edged out the Chanticleers 28-27 at home in a sloppy affair last season. This is still a game that A-State should win, but with the gradual growth that's been occurring in Myrtle Beach's football team, this is a game that can also easily fall out of the Red Wolves' grasp.

The Georgia State Panthers will come to Jonesboro to capitalize off their 52-38 upset



Photo Courtesy of: A-State Athletics

The Red Wolves have a tough schedule in 2020, with two top-25 non-conference games in store.

over A-State last October, but that loss came at a time where the Red Wolves were overrun by serious injuries across the board. Anything less than a 2-0 start to conference play would be a disappointment.

The back-to-back defending Sun Belt champions follow the Panthers, and Appalachian State will try to continue their dominance over the Red Wolves and the rest of the Sun Belt in Boone, North Carolina. There are still many question marks surrounding the Mountaineers however, as they will field their

third head coach in as many seasons. This was a recipe that ended up coming back to haunt the Red Wolves early in the previous decade.

Troy is always a close game against A-State, and after just notching a 50-43 win over the Trojans last season, the Red Wolves will host Troy in what could be seen as a trap game before travelling to Lafayette to face the thorn in A-State's side, the Ragin' Cajuns.

Louisiana has taken town the Red Wolves twice in a row since Billy Napier took over the

program, and with home field advantage being more crucial here than most other contests A-State will face, this will be the game of the year to see if the Red Wolves can overcome the team that has knocked them out of Sun Belt championship contention for the past two years.

ULM, Texas State, and South Alabama will close the season out for A-State in what should be a 3-0 end to the season, but the Jaguars pulled off a 34-30 upset over the Red Wolves in 2019 which put the

nail in the coffin for any title hopes then.

Plenty of fun and high stakes games are on the horizon for A-State football, but with bigger games than ever before, coach Blake Anderson's team must be able to both step up and deliver against the titans in the schedule, but also stay focused on the lower quality teams that all have potential to ruin yet another championship run.

For more information regarding the 2020 football season, visit astateredwolves.com.

Red Wolves Bowling eye first tournament win at Conference

BRAD BREWER
SPORTS EDITOR

The battle to qualify for the NCAA Bowling tournament continues in Jonesboro, as A-State looks ahead to the Southland Conference Tournament beginning on March 20.

The Red Wolves have had a consistent season thus far, placing in the top-three of all four of the tournaments they have competed in this year. The only problem with that is the team has failed to claim a victory among those podium finishes, including their recent second place finish at the Music City Classic last weekend.

Freshman Emma Stull, who received all-tournament honors for her performance in Nashville, opened up about how the lack of victories doesn't bring doubt upon herself or the team, but is beginning to frustrate them.

"It doesn't worry us," Stull said. "I think we are all just kind of annoyed and frustrated that we finished second so I feel like it's pushing us to get better. I definitely feel like this weekend

was the best performance we've had all season."

En route to the second place finish at the Music City Classic, Arkansas State was able to vanquish reigning NCAA champions Vanderbilt, but fell short in the finals against McKendree.

"We've beaten them throughout the season, but never really when we really needed to," Stull said. "We lost to them in our home tournament and it was a nice feeling to beat them at their own tournament and they had a lot of people there. It was definitely a weight off of all of our shoulders."

With the Music City Classic being the final invitational of the year for the Red Wolves, all of their focus is now set on the Southland tournament which will be stacked with competition itself, including teams like Vanderbilt and other top-five teams such as Sam Houston State.

"The Southland Conference is probably the most competitive conference out of all of them," Stull said. "It's going to be a challenge because we will have to beat Vandy again if we want to win and we have to beat teams that are in the top-five

too. We have a lot of competition but hopefully we can put it together."

This season has featured an influx of new players to the A-State roster, with three new freshmen including Stull herself joining the team. Because of this, the team spent the earlier parts of the season to gel together and to figure out how to be the best team they could be.

"We've gotten a lot closer as a team recently," Stull said. "At the beginning of the season we had a lot of new people so it was a lot of meeting and becoming close with each other so it's a lot better now. I feel like our team is really close and that we can finally win something."

The format for this year's NCAA tournament has changed from previous years, with the Southland Conference Tournament not having a direct connection with the national tournament, instead the Red Wolves will have to play their way into the final four through a regional system.

"Southland doesn't affect nationals," Stull said. "After conference, we have to still be ranked in the top-four in RPI

to not pull anyone else in the top-four.

Then we will be sent into a regional tournament which we have to win if we want to go onto nationals.

The four regional champions are the only teams who go to the national championship."

Stull believes that the lack of victories was initially a mental roadblock for the team, but after a pivotal moment in their game against Vanderbilt, she believes it's now a strength.

"I feel like at the beginning of

the year it was still a roadblock," Stull said. "Our first tournament of the year we finished second, and since then it's been nothing but second and third, but now I feel like it's pushing us. When we were bowling against Vandy, we were up three to nothing but then they won three games. A bunch of us were talking and we were like, 'I'm tired of losing,' and I feel like that pushed us to do better because at some point you're just tired of losing."

The Southland Conference Tournament will be held at Time to Spare Entertainment in Conroe, Texas and starts next Friday with first round matchups starting at 8:30 a.m., followed by second round matches beginning at 1:30 p.m.

Third and fourth round matches will begin at the same times respectively on Saturday before the final round on Sunday at 8:30 a.m. with the championship rounds beginning afterwards.

TEAM	RPI(RANK)	WL RECORD
McKendree	0.650 (1)	82-17-0
Sam Houston St.	0.625 (2)	72-30-0
Arkansas St.	0.624 (3)	62-27-0
Nebraska	0.624 (4)	60-28-0
Vanderbilt	0.624 (5)	58-29-0

Standings Courtesy of: NCAA.com

The Red Wolves currently sit third in the nation ahead of the Southland Tournament.