

Red Wolves become the change Athletics hosts BLM campus march

BRAD BREWER
SPORTS EDITOR

Hundreds of thousands of protestors across the country have marched for social justice and racial equality over the summer after the death of George Floyd and the shooting of Jacob Blake by police. The entire athletics department joined those protests Monday morning in a march around the Arkansas State campus, where athletes were advocating for people to, “#BeTheChange.”

The idea for the march spawned inside the minds of members of the football team after players began discussions over what is happening in America, and when head coach Blake Anderson heard about their concerns and desire to spread their message, he was completely on board.

“It started with guys on the football team having locker room talks,” sophomore cornerback Jarius Reimonenq said. “We were talking about everything going on in the country and in the world, so the leadership council brought it to coach Anderson and he was really supportive of us and thought it was a good thing to do to let the public see our view against racism and all those things. From there, word spread. Coach Anderson brought it to the athletic director and the chancellor and the Student Athletic-Advisory Committee, and we put it together and organized it to where every sport could come and march together.”

Many A-State teams joined the cause and made a large splash in the protest, and it wasn't only the players marching. Photographs showed head coaches such as men's basketball's Mike Balado and volleyball's Santiago Restrepo marching side by side with their players.

“Honestly it means the world to us,” Reimonenq said. “I don't think the coaches can understand how much it does mean because the coaches don't have anything that is forcing them to support us and stand with us. But they are choosing to, despite what people are going to say about them and all that. They could easily be one of the people who disagree with us, but them being here to show us support and showing us they want to help, that means a lot



COURTESY OF ARKANSAS STATE ATHLETICS

Arkansas State University Athletics hosted a BLM march Monday morning where every team in the department marched.



COURTESY OF ARKANSAS STATE ATHLETICS

Many athletes carried different signs during the march.

to us. Now we know we aren't in this alone.”

Senior midfielder Hailey Furio from the soccer team is a member of the SAAC, and also stresses the importance of having the support from coaches during the movement, believing it unites the teams and the department.

“I think it's powerful that our coaches are standing with us,” Furio said. “It just really shows that this is about everyone mattering. It isn't necessarily about one population. If you care about all lives, you should care about black lives because that's the population being oppressed right now. I think by our coaches joining us it shows unity and that it isn't about any sort of political views or anything controversial. It's just about loving each other and wanting to band together.”

Coach Restrepo finds the passion that the student-athletes have for advocating

for change to be beautiful, and says it is something that needs to happen across the entire country.

“We try to talk to our players and talk once a week about this,” Restrepo said. “It is beautiful that the athletic department got together and decided to do the march. I was there and our team was there. It's something that has to happen and is happening at campuses across the country. It's something that we try to do more often and educate and make sure that everyone goes out to vote.”

Reimonenq has had his entire view on life changed due to the events over the summer and the reemergence of the Black Lives Matter protests. A view where he is now more cautious, but also has an increased appreciation for what he has.

“I think the movement has made me change things on how I see my personal life. That's really about valuing

my companionship with my brothers and my teammates, just valuing the time I spend with people more. It teaches me how fast our lives can be gone. Like we say in the movement, we have to be the change. It really impacted me because I have to start with myself. Because if I want to create change I have to start with my daily life and treat everybody, no matter what race, with respect. And just trusting God and getting closer with God so that's how the movement has impacted me personally.”

Furio says she is unable to understand what her African-American peers are going through, but wants to fight with them to make the country Americans share a better place for all races.

“For me it sparked a lot of hard emotions,” Furio said. “It was tough to see the news coverage and it really hit home. I know that I personally cannot understand

what they are feeling, but just knowing that my brothers and sisters and people around me are having to deal with that is just painful for me to see, and sparked something in me to want to do something to change that.”

Black Lives Matter has become a polarizing political issue due to actions such as kneeling during the national anthem and rioting occurring in multiple protest hotspots. Reimonenq has respect for those who disagree with him and the movement, but wants his dissenters to realize one crucial thing.

“I believe that everyone is entitled to their own opinion, and I can't force anybody to side with us or support us,” Reimonenq said. “I understand that. And I understand and am aware that all lives do matter. But what I want people who don't agree with us to realize is that all lives aren't being targeted. All lives don't get pulled over

by the police and think that they are going to lose their life. All lives don't live day to day in fear from walking out of their house and dying just because of the color of their skin. I stand with all lives. I love every race. But I just hope that those people can realize that black lives, we want to matter just like the other lives matter. When we say black lives matter, we aren't saying, ‘black lives are the only thing that matters, nothing else matters.’ What we are saying is we want to matter too. We generate a lot of income for this country. We generate a lot of notoriety and publicity to this state, to this school and wherever we are. We just want to know we have the same opportunity and the same treatment as all lives.”

Furio echoes Reimonenq's sentiment over understanding and respecting dissenting opinions, and believes that open conversations with those across the aisle is the best avenue to create change.

“I think it's really important when someone has an opposite view from you that you sit down and listen. Even though you may think they're wrong or if they are coming at it in a way that isn't pleasing to you, having an open conversation is where I think the most change comes. Not rejecting people for their views, but trying to understand where they are coming from and kind of push them towards a more equal and opportunistic view.”

Even though social media seems to be a warzone full of passionate and sometimes hostile displays from all sides of this issue, Reimonenq urges his allies to continue marching with respect and love.

“To the people who are marching and supportive, I encourage them to keep marching,” Reimonenq said. “Keep doing whatever you are doing. I encourage people to be the change you want to see. Most people think that their voice is too small, but one individual can change the minds of a lot of individuals. So I just want to encourage people that it is possible to make change. Treat everyone with respect, treat everyone with love and people will see that in you and the next thing you know a trend is started. When people see that, that's how change starts.”

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Battle for the Paint Bucket returns Memphis hosts A-State to renew classic rivalry

ALEX GALBRAITH

SPORTS WRITER

For the first time in seven years the Paint Bucket is up for grabs as the Arkansas State Red Wolves travel to take on the Memphis Tigers Saturday night. The game, which will be nationally televised on ESPN, renews a rivalry between two teams that have met just nine times since 2000. Memphis leads the all-time series against Arkansas State 29-24-5, winning the last matchup in 2013 by a score of 31-7.

Saturday's matchup is unique for a myriad of reasons, but none bigger than the fact that it is taking place in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic. Memphis is requiring fans to sit 12 feet apart, with athletic director Laird Veatch expecting around 4,000 fans in attendance. That could bode well for Arkansas State, as the Red Wolves have not won at Memphis since 1989.

Both teams enter the 2020 season coming off successful 2019 campaigns. Memphis finished the season 12-2, winning the American Athletic

Conference and making the Cotton Bowl before falling to Penn State. The Tigers now bring in a new head coach in Ryan Silverfield after previous coach Mike Norvell left to take the head coach vacancy at Florida State.

Meanwhile, Arkansas State is coming off an emotional 2019 season that saw head coach Blake Anderson lose his wife, Wendy, to breast cancer. The team, and the entire country, rallied behind Anderson, who by season's end led the Red Wolves to an 8-5 record and a victory over Florida International in the Camellia Bowl.

Going into Saturday, both teams will have a lot of key pieces to replace. On Sunday, Memphis star running back Kenneth Gainwell, who rushed for over 1,400 yards last season, announced he would be opting out of the 2020 season.

The Tigers will now rely more heavily on senior quarterback Brady White and wide receiver Damonte Coxie, who led the Tigers to an average of 40.4 points per game in 2019.

Arkansas State will now see what life is like without



COURTESY OF ARKANSAS STATE ATHLETICS

Arkansas State football travels to Memphis for its first game of the season to renew an old rivalry against a classic, regional foe.

star wide receivers Omar Bayless and Kirk Merritt, who combined for 29 of A-State's 37 reception touchdowns in 2019. Layne Hatcher returns at quarterback for the Red Wolves after completing 65.8% of his passes for 2,946 yards in replacement of the injured Logan Bonner. Bonner will

actually start under center for A-State at Memphis but Anderson said both Bonner and Hatcher will get playing time.

In a game between two up-tempo and high scoring offenses, the defense will certainly be the difference maker. Memphis owns the clear advantage on that side of the ball. The Tigers

return seven defensive starters from a unit that allowed 26.4 points per game in 2019. Memphis is also led by new defensive coordinator Mike Macintyre, the 2016 PAC-12 Coach of the Year at Colorado.

Arkansas State, meanwhile, returns only three defensive starters from a unit that

allowed 34.2 points per game and nearly 500 yards of offense per game as well.

With Gainwell now sitting out, neither team will have potent rushing attacks.

Whoever can stop the pass may be in position to win the first Paint Bucket since 2013.

Volleyball preps for a shorter 2020 season amid pandemic

BRAD BREWER

SPORTS EDITOR

College sports are back, and while football is kicking off its season Saturday against Memphis, A-State volleyball will begin its 2020 campaign on September 12 against Central Arkansas.

In an off-season as unpredictable as they come, the team didn't even know if they would be on the court this fall. But when head coach Santiago Restrepo called to begin working out and practice, the Red Wolves answered.

"When the pandemic started, we obviously didn't do anything in the spring," Restrepo said. "So during the summer we had people asking about workouts. We got into a zoom call and asked if the players wanted to come in the beginning of July to start working out and all of them said yes. We had everyone tested and a couple of kids tested positive but that was earlier in the summer way before they came here. They quarantined at their place and when they got tested here they all tested negative. They were able to work out with our strength and conditioning coach. Our practices started Aug.



COURTESY OF ARKANSAS STATE ATHLETICS

Timber Terrell was selected to the Preseason All-SBC team and A-State is predicted to finish fourth in the West Division.

7 and they were able to start working on roles. Everyone is wearing masks and we are sanitizing everything and taking temperatures every day."

Even when the players were practicing on the court, some were still doubtful that a season was going to materialize. Those doubts have been alleviated as A-State will play a slightly abbreviated schedule this year with only two non-conference contests.

"Right now we are moving forward," Restrepo said. "We are going to have a season. Right now we have 22 matches scheduled this year and we normally do 28 or 29. Everybody is now in good morale and everybody

is training hard and getting better."

Restrepo went on 95.3 The Ticket last weekend and expressed his pleasure in how the defensive side is shaping up with improvements to blocking and a couple of key liberos fully recovered from injury.

"Defenses start with blocking," Restrepo said. "Obviously I think our middle blockers have done a very good job putting up big blocks. We are touching and deflecting a lot more balls with our blocks which is our first line of defense. Behind our block we have Ryley Gill who is very good as a libero and she was really good last year but unfortunately in her first match she got hurt.

But she's back at 100%. And Tatum Ticknor didn't play last year and she's now back in full force and she's doing really well for the team. And with our newcomer Becca Zaber, we are keeping a lot of balls alive and digging a lot of balls. That's really encouraging for our team because it's going to be super hard to put the ball away against us."

The Red Wolves had a bit of a tune-up on Saturday with the Red-Black scrimmage, and the "Black Squad" took a decisive 3-0 victory, edging out the "Red Squad" in the final set 26-24. Even though the game itself was one-sided, Restrepo believes that the teams were evenly split and that there is more depth and

competitive spirit than what that game showed.

"I thought we were going to split that team evenly," Restrepo said. "That was the whole purpose. But volleyball is crazy like that. It just happened to be that one team won 3-0 at that moment. During practice once or twice with those teams, they were super competitive and they were split on games. So when it came to the scrimmage itself, I was hoping it would be more even and it showed in the third set and I hoped we would go four or five sets to show that competitive edge for everybody. It didn't happen but that's okay too."

The NCAA has ruled that every student athlete will receive an extra year

of eligibility due to the COVID-19 pandemic, so while it is unclear which seniors will elect to stay and which will decide to move on after this season, Restrepo is excited to see what a pair of senior outside hitters can do this season.

"Yes, the seniors are seniors and some are going to graduate and move on," Restrepo said, "But we'll say out of the seniors someone to look out for is Madison Brown. She has improved a lot and is getting used to a new position and is actually doing a great job. Paulina, another outside hitter, she's developing and getting better in the front row but she's also a very good passer and defender."

Regarding the younger talent on the team, the pairing of middle blocker Brianna Hollingshed and right side hitter Kendahl Davenport is expected to show great things and make sizable improvements this fall.

"Some sophomores like Kendahl Davenport and Brianna Hollingshed have improved and have gotten a lot better and are two we should keep a major eye on," Restrepo said. "I think they are going to be two major contributors. There are a few that are going to be really good at the end of the year."