

# Texas State fends off A-State's upset bid

## Sun Belt tournament now on the horizon

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SPORTS EDITOR

Another tough weekend ended Arkansas State's regular season with an 8-8 record, after the Texas State Bobcats took down the Red Wolves in all three of their matchups last weekend in Jonesboro.

Friday went terribly for A-State, as the hosts were swept twice by the back-to-back conference champions. The first matchup that morning really only featured one player producing for the Red Wolves in senior outside hitter Madison Brown, who hit for an impressive .368 hitting percentage and 16 kills.

The problem was that no one else stepped up to the plate offensively, as returning junior outside hitter Macey Putt and junior right side hitter Josie Stanford both struggled, hitting negatively that morning.

That night, even Brown lost her touch, as the Red Wolves hit .000 in another crushing loss on a night filled with low morale.

Though Friday was silent, Saturday saw life restored into the Red Wolves. A-State took the first two sets in with razor tight scorelines, but the Bobcats responded with the third and the fourth to force the fifth, and the undefeated Texas State squad ran away with a 15-6 fifth set victory to survive the upset scare.

"Texas State is super tough and they make you play perfectly point-by-point," head coach Santiago Restrepo said. "Unfortunately we had a couple of hiccups, but I liked the way the team responded on Saturday. We could have beaten them in three sets but it didn't bounce our way."

The key reason for A-State's success on Saturday compared to the lethargic performances on Friday was a complete change in formation. Restrepo elected to change his 5-1 offense to a 6-2 by moving sophomore Kendahl Davenport to the right side, and bringing in true freshman Mariah Hesselgesser to take her place at the middle blocker position.



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Senior Paulina Sobolewska, sophomore Kendahl Davenport and junior Josie Stanford team up for a block against the Bobcats' Tyeranee Scott.

"The one thing that we actually struggled with is stopping more than just Janell Fitzgerald," Restrepo said. "The outside hitter (Lauren Teske) got her kills and we had to try something new. That's why we put Kendahl in the opposite to block the outside hitters and then we moved Mariah in the middle. We had to run a 6-2 offense instead of a 5-1 and I thought by changing that it took a bit away from what they were trying to do against us and gave us a little bit of an edge. We just couldn't sustain it throughout the entire match. Which, for not practicing it at all, it was a little bit tough."

Heading into the tournament, this new 6-2 lineup the Red Wolves put on display last Saturday could be an ace up their sleeves as A-State will have to face the

undefeated Coastal Carolina Chanticleers from the east division.

"Nobody had seen us with that lineup," Restrepo. "They will be able to scout our 5-1 but will only have one match to study our 6-2 and that's it. We're going to have to work a lot on that 6-2 while also understanding that we have the 5-1 that we can run. The good thing about it is that we can practice it and if the situation presents itself, we can go to either."

Restrepo indicated that one of the 6-2's strengths is that it enables Davenport's physicality by going up against the outside hitter of a team. And since the Chanticleers are known to be a physical squad, it wouldn't be a surprise to see the 6-2 pulled out again against the team from Conway, South

Carolina.

"It's a little bit of back up," Restrepo said. "I think that Kendahl's physicality forces outside hitters to be more predictable and she shuts them down pretty well. Kendahl and Josie do a really good job on the right side in putting up big blocks and deflecting a lot of touches."

Even with the new strategy and the unpredictability the Red Wolves can now bring to the court, Restrepo still says that A-State is not favored going into its matchup against the champions of the East.

"I think we are the underdogs," Restrepo said. "Obviously when Coastal came here last year they beat us. The lefty opposite from Coastal [Anett Nemeth] had 30 kills when they beat us in four sets. We are going to

have to work a bit more in practice on concentrating on how to stop their opposite hitter. We'll see."

With the new format for the Sun Belt Conference tournament this year, all teams qualify for the tournament and are placed in four groups of three. A-State joins Coastal Carolina and Appalachian State in Pool A, and will face the Mountaineers first on Nov. 19.

While the Chanticleers sit on top of the Sun Belt east division with a perfect 14-0 conference record, the Mountaineers are actually on the opposite side of the east's standings, placed last in the division with a conference record of 1-10. If things go according to plan this week as the two teams will square off against each other in a pair of games, this group will not

change.

"I think our main focus right now is on Appalachian State," Restrepo said. "They also came here last year and beat us. They are really talented regardless of their record. It's our first match and we will have to concentrate on them and then on Friday we will worry about Coastal. If you don't beat App State, then you're not going to be in it. You have to win both, so App State is first and foremost. I don't want to look ahead since they are still a very good team and very well coached."

**SEE BELOW:** The team in Pool A with the best record during pool play will advance to the semifinals. The other two teams will be eliminated. Pool A matches are scheduled for 5 p.m. every day and will be broadcast on ESPN+.

## 2020 SUN BELT CONFERENCE TOURNAMENT POOL A

Wednesday, Nov. 18

Coastal Carolina  
v  
Appalachian State

5:00 p.m.

Thursday, Nov. 19

Arkansas State  
v  
Appalachian State

5:00 p.m.

Friday, Nov. 20

Arkansas State  
v  
Coastal Carolina

5:00 p.m.

## Football v ULM preview: Delayed to Dec. 12

### Red Wolves originally looked to rebound against Warhawks

ALEX GALBRAITH

SPORTS WRITER

Arkansas State's luck was bound to run out at some point. After its thrilling 59-52 victory over Georgia State, head coach Blake Anderson knew the Red Wolves had dodged a major bullet. A-State sat at 3-2 overall and 1-1 in conference play following that win, one that kept its Sun Belt title hopes alive. The following week though, everything came tumbling down.

#### Defense still struggling

Since A-State's win over Georgia State, the Red Wolves have lost three straight games by a combined score of 110-47. The defensive struggles should not come as a surprise though. The defense has been lackluster all season, so much that Blake Anderson fired defensive coordinator David Duggan and defensive pass game coordinator Ed Pinkham following the Georgia State win.

The Red Wolves allowed 583 yards of offense in that game. Prior to that, the Red Wolves had allowed 411 yards to UCA and 539 yards to Coastal Carolina.

#### ...the offense is too

The surprise during this losing streak has been the lack of offense. The Red Wolves averaged 38.2 points per game in their first five games, but have averaged just 15.7 points per game in their last three games. The dual quarterback experiment has struggled during this span too, as Logan Bonner and Layne Hatcher have combined for just two touchdowns and three interceptions in the last three games. It should be noted that Hatcher is responsible for both touchdowns and just one interception, while Bonner is responsible for zero touchdowns and two interceptions. This is perhaps an indicator of who should receive the starting job going forward.

#### It only goes up from here

Luckily, A-State should get back on track both offensively and defensively when a winless ULM team comes to Centennial Bank Stadium on Dec. 12.

The Warhawks simply have not been competitive this season. ULM's closest loss came against Georgia Southern where they fell by five points. But even that game was not nearly as



COURTESY OF ARKANSAS STATE ATHLETICS

True freshman running back Lincoln Pare was the bright spot in A-State's 27-20 loss against Louisiana, rushing for 121 yards.

close as the final score indicated as the Warhawks trailed by 18 late in the third quarter. ULM has lost all eight games by an average of 21.8 points and their offense averages just 310.9 yards per game including just 66 rushing yards per game. Even worse, ULM has committed 16

turnovers this season, one of the worst marks in the entire country.

While A-State is more of a passing team, the run game could carry the Red Wolves in this one as ULM is allowing 258.9 rushing yards per game. That is very promising considering the Red Wolves

rushed for 199 yards last week at Louisiana, one of the better defenses within the conference.

After the monumental upset over Kansas State, no one expected A-State to be sitting at 3-5 (1-4) with three games remaining in the season. Every game from here on out feels like

a must win for the Red Wolves. Fortunately, the worst part of their schedule is over, as their remaining three opponents have a combined record of 4-20. The game against ULM was moved to Dec. 12 due to COVID-19 concerns in the ULM football program.

## Soccer falls in SBC Final amid highly controversial red card

### Dooley wins Coach of the Year as A-State racks up awards

KRISHNAN COLLINS

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The Arkansas State women's soccer team stood 25 minutes away from the Red Wolves' first ever Sun Belt Conference title in the sport holding a 1-0 lead courtesy of a 48th minute Hailey Cloud rocket before a controversial second yellow card sent Olivia Smith off the pitch in the 65th minute turning the tide of the match.

Smith received her first yellow in the 52nd minute before the referee took a great game of soccer into her own hands just 13 minutes later and swung all the momentum toward South Alabama. Smith was sandwiched between two South Alabama defenders before being pushed to the ground by one of the Jaguars.

The South Alabama player that pushed Smith landed on Smith's back and laid on top of the A-State senior. Smith spun on her side simply to get up and continue playing when the South Alabama player lying on Smith's back flopped dramatically onto the ground flailing her hands in the air. The referee blew her whistle at the reaction of the South Alabama player and gave Smith her second yellow.

The referee stood firm and stayed with her shocking decision of sending Smith off the field and sending A-State down to 10 players on the pitch. Before the red card A-State had taken the lead early in the second half and South Alabama was struggling to find rhythm. The Jaguars were not having much luck getting through A-State's stout midfield and backline.

However, the controversial red card totally flipped the match on its head and gave South Alabama all the momentum. After the red card A-State was forced to defend deep in their own half for a majority of the remaining 25 minutes in the match. A-State held firm for so, so long before Morgan Cross found the back of the net in the 85th minute. Just three minutes later, Cross scored again to win the game for the Jaguars.

After the match, Smith, Megan McClure, Sarah Sodoma and Hailey Cloud were awarded All-Tournament honors.

The ending of the championship match cannot extinguish the spectacular, historic season the Red Wolves had and the careers of the senior class on the team, including Smith, McClure, Sodoma, Victoria MacIntosh, Maggie Ertl, Hailey Furio and



COURTESY OF MIYA GARRETT | ARKANSAS STATE ATHLETICS

A-State senior Sarah Sodoma battles a South Alabama defender in A-State's 2-1 defeat to the Jaguars in the SBC Final Sunday.

Julianna Coates who helped turn the program around.

The Red Wolves finished the 2020 season as SBC regular season champions.

The SBC announced its awards for the season Tuesday as A-State received many major honors.

A-State head coach Brian Dooley was named SBC Coach of the Year as Dooley led his team

to a regular season championship and the Red Wolves' second consecutive trip to the SBC Championship match.

Sodoma was awarded SBC Player of the Year, SBC Offensive Player of the Year and First Team All-Sun Belt. McClure was named SBC Defensive Player of the Year and First Team All-Sun Belt. Hailey Cloud was named

Second Team All-Sun Belt.

Sodoma continued her amazing career in an A-State kit this season taking over the No.1 spot as A-State's all time leading goal scorer. Sodoma has scored 29 goals in her career as a Red Wolf. The St. Louis native also has 15 assists to her name at A-State, good for second in A-State history. McClure reigns clean sheet

queen at A-State as the Red Wolves' all-time shutout leader holds 21 clean sheets to her name.

The Red Wolves ended the regular season undefeated in the SBC with a 7-0-1 record in the league and an 8-1-1 overall record. After the conference tournament, A-State finished the season with a 10-2-1 record on the year.