

Red Wolves lose season finale, ending 3-9

BRAYDEN MORSE

SPORTS EDITOR

Another game where the Arkansas State football team could not finish the game and hold onto the lead.

The Red Wolves had a 13-7 lead at halftime, scoring only six points in the second half. The game started off positive for A-State after junior cornerback Samy Johnson had a 69-yard interception on Troy's first drive of the game, and a 20-yard field goal from Dominic Zvada to put the Red Wolves up 3-0.

On the Trojan's first scoring drive, they got down the field via rushing yards and penalties. No passing yards, as sophomore running back Kimani Vidal scored his first of four rushing touchdowns of the game. Troy led 7-3 with six seconds left in the first quarter.

Arkansas State's defense came up big with senior linebacker Kivon Bennett getting a strip sack, where the Red Wolves recovered the fumble with a little more than a minute left in the first half.

After the defense recovered the ball and gave the offense the ball back, senior quarterback James Blackman rushed for a 30-yard touchdown to put A-State up 13-7 with 24 seconds left in the first half. That 30-yard rushing touchdown was Blackman's second-longest rushing play of his career.

In the second half, the Trojans started to separate

themselves from Arkansas State. Troy converted on a 4th and 1 with a 23-yard rush by senior running back DK Billingsly with a little less than six minutes left in the third quarter. On the same drive, junior quarterback Gunnar Watson threw a touchdown pass to senior wide receiver Rajae' Johnson to give the Trojans the lead 14-13.

On Arkansas State's next scoring drive, Junior quarterback AJ Mayer, known for running the football when he goes into the game, threw a touchdown pass to senior tight-end Reed Tyler to put the Red Wolves up 19-14 late in the third quarter.

Kimani Vidal scored on a seven-yard rushing touchdown with 14:55 left in the game, as the Trojans went up 20-19. The Trojans got a pick-six early in the fourth quarter that gave them a 27-19 lead.

Troy milked the clock on their next drive as they had a 2:32 drive on five plays, ending with Kimani Vidal scoring his third rushing touchdown of the game with a 12-yard rush. The Trojans would lead 34-19 with 8:13 left in the game. Kimani Vidal scored his fourth rushing touchdown of the game on a 39-yard rushing touchdown with 4:38 left in the game.

"In the fourth quarter we were only down 20-19, and then the pick-six and turning the ball over two consecutive times. We did not do a good job of maintaining field position. In the first half we



The Arkansas State offense gets together to celebrate a touchdown against Troy.

PHOTO BY JESSICA McMILLAN | PHOTO EDITOR

only gave up one tackle for loss and zero sacks opposed to six tackles for loss and three sacks in the second half. We did not give up any explosive plays in the first half, and the second half we gave up five," Head coach Butch Jones said.

Kimani Vidal finished the game with 33 carries for 208 rushing yards and four

rushing touchdowns. The performance allowed him to go over 1,000 rushing yards on the season. Rajae' Johnson had only three receptions, but 101 receiving yards and one receiving touchdown. James Blackman finished 20-35 with 220 passing yards and one interception. He also had one rushing touchdown.

Kivon Bennett finished the game with two sacks in his last game as a Red Wolf. "This team means a lot to me and you cannot get this type of connection anywhere else unless you are in the military. The game of football provides that. My teammates looked up to me and embraced me as a leader and I will always be grateful

for that," James Blackman said. The Red Wolves season comes to an end, finishing 3-9. It was a disappointing season, but there is always next year. This A-State team will look a lot different next year as the team will lose a lot of key positions due to seniors leaving.

Final Sun Belt Conference standings

East:

8-3, 6-2 9-2, 6-2 8-4, 5-3 6-6, 3-5 6-6, 3-5



4-8, 3-5 3-9, 2-6



James Madison will play for the SBC Championship

West:

10-2, 7-1 10-2, 7-1 6-6, 4-4 6-6, 4-4 4-8, 3-5



4-8, 2-6 3-9, 1-7



Troy will play for the SBC Championship

What's next for A-State football?

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As the football season comes to an end, there are a lot of questions for Arkansas State's future.

Statistics do not lie and are a big part of reflecting on seasons. Kicking statistics seemed to be the lone strongsuit for this football team. First-year kicker Dominic Zvada was 17-18 on field goals which was tied for fourteenth best in the nation. Zvada was also nominated as a semifinalist for the Lou Groza Award.

The Red Wolves averaged 25 points per game, with 300 total points and 32 total touchdowns. They allowed an average of 31.42 points per game with 377 total points allowed. The differential between the points for and against is astronomical.

"The next two weeks are vital and critical for our football team. We will do a full examination and evaluation on the team, and invite everyone back that we think deserve to be invited back and be a part of this team as we build this football family. In order to take the next step, we need everyone to commit to our principles and values that are going to guide us everyday," Butch Jones said.

Arkansas State only had 16 passing and rushing touchdowns. To be bowl eligible, a team needs their quarterback to throw for

at least 25 passing touchdowns a year. The A-State defense gave up 25 passing touchdowns and 23 rushing touchdowns.

They only had 23 sacks on the season. Getting to the quarterback is a main priority for this team to fix during the offseason. Team sack leader and senior captain, Kivon Bennett, had 5.5 sacks and will be gone next year. Look for Arkansas State to add pass rushers to bolster up front.

The Red Wolves averaged 314.8 yards per game while allowing an average of 405.1 yards per game.

Senior quarterback James Blackman, senior running back Johnnie Lang Jr., senior wide receiver Te'Vailance Hunt and senior wide receiver Champ Flemings are among few key offensive players that will be gone next year. The offensive line was a major negative factor for this football team. The line is young and needs more experience and new higher rated recruits to protect the quarterback. James Blackman was not protected well all year long.

The Red Wolves have already signed 3-star wide receiver Tennel Bryant from Moeller High School in Ohio. He claims to be the fastest wide receiver in Ohio as it seems to be true with his 4.3 40-yard dash and 10.2 100-meter in track. He is also a 100-meter

champion in track. The speed could carry over to this A-State offense with more versatility and explosive plays, which this team needs. To see Bryant's highlights, go to hudl.com and type in "Tennel Bryant Slot Wr 2023 Highlights" in the search bar.

"The open recruiting starts on Friday and we will have a big official visit this weekend and even a bigger one the following weekend, then a third one. The first three weeks of December will be official visits. We are going to sign a lot of players and we are going to make sure we get the right fits. It is exciting because we finally have a foundation of young players in our program. We are going to build upon that," Butch Jones said.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SCOUTING OHIO 2023 wide receiver commit Tennel Bryant

Men's basketball beats Bethel by 25 points



PHOTO COURTESY OF ARKANSAS STATE ATHLETICS

Senior guard #1 Markise Davis shooting a shot against Prairie View A&M.

The Arkansas State men's basketball team defeated Bethel 90-65 to move to 4-3 on the season.

Redshirt sophomore guard #10 Malcolm Farrington scored 18 points to lead the Red Wolves, who shot 58.6 percent from the field, had 20 assists, and outrebounded the Wildcats 34-28. Farrington's five field goals all came from beyond the arc, where he went 5-of-8.

Markise Davis scored 15 points and grabbed five rebounds for the third game in a row on 6-of-7 shooting, including 3-of-4 from deep. Sophomore forward #23 Julian Lual scored 12 points off the bench and shot a team-high 6-for-6 from the free throw line.

What's next:

Opponent:

Mississippi Valley State

Tipoff:

Thursday at 7 p.m.

Where:

First National Bank Arena

Tune in:

ESPN+

Men's basketball team stats

Total points:

- 499 for
- 445 against

Points per game:

- 71.3 for
- 63.6 against

Field goal percentage:

- .469 for
- .414 against

Three-point percentage:

- .333 for
- .398 against

Free-throw percentage:

- .692 for
- .713 against

Women's basketball team stats

Total points:

- 417 for
- 402 against

Points per game:

- 69.5 for
- 67.0 against

Field goal percentage:

- .393 for
- .391 against

Three-point percentage:

- .286 for
- .310 against

Free-throw percentage:

- .734 for
- .690 against

Professional Red Wolves making a name for themselves



PHOTO COURTESY OF MLB.COM

Daniel Wright played for A-State from 2010-2013 as a pitcher. He currently plays for the Los Angeles Angels and made his professional debut on May 24, 2016. Wright was drafted by the Cincinnati Reds in 2013.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SPORTS FORECASTER

Tyler Zuber played for A-State from 2014-2017 as a pitcher. He currently plays for the Arizona Diamondbacks and made his professional debut on July 24, 2020. Zuber was drafted by the Kansas City Royals in 2017.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CANAL STREET CHRONICLES

Demario Davis played for A-State from 2008-2011 as a linebacker. He currently plays for the New Orleans Saints and made his professional debut in 2012. Davis was drafted by the New York Jets in 2012. He was also a broadcasting major in college.

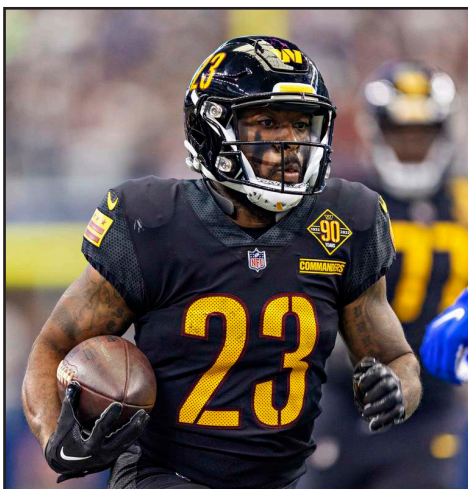


PHOTO COURTESY OF DRAFTKINGS NATION

J.D. McKissic played for A-State from 2011-2014 as a running back. He currently plays for the Washington Commanders and made his professional debut in 2016. McKissic was undrafted in 2016 and was first picked up by the Atlanta Falcons.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHARLOTTE OBSERVER

Omar Bayless played for A-State from 2015-2019 as a wide receiver. He played for the Carolina Panthers and Kansas City Chiefs. He made his professional debut in 2020. Bayless was undrafted in 2020 and was picked up by the Carolina Panthers.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MIAMIDOLPHINS.COM

Kirk Merritt played for A-State from 2018-2019 as a wide receiver. He currently plays for the New Orleans Saints, alongside Demario Davis, and made his professional debut in 2020. Merritt was undrafted in 2020 and picked up by the Miami Dolphins.

Women's basketball scores over 100 points in win over McNeese State

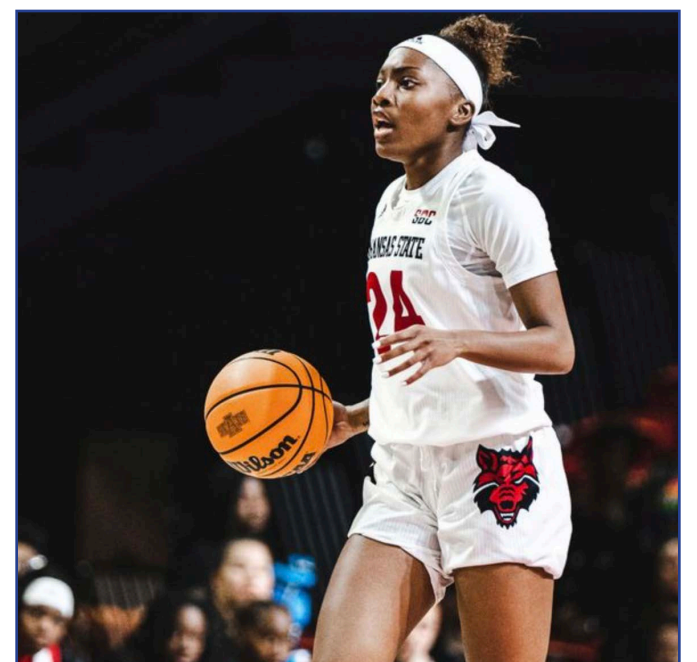


PHOTO COURTESY OF ARKANSAS STATE ATHLETICS

Sophomore guard #24 Lauryn Pendleton going down the court.

The Arkansas State women's basketball team beat McNeese State 102-83.

"A-State women's basketball has hit the century mark. It is the first time that the Red Wolves has gone over 100 points since Dec. 30, 2015 at Troy," The Ticket Radio Network and The Big 107.9 KFIN worker, Kara Richey said. The Lady Red Wolves will travel to Florence, Alabama to play against North Alabama next Thursday on ESPN+.