

A-State women's hoops hopeful for success in '24

BENJAMIN MCDOWELL

STAFF WRITER

Third-year head coach Destinee Rogers will be looking for significant improvement this year as her team brings in fresh talent.

The Red Wolves women's basketball team ended last year with a 13-17 record and 6-12 record in conference. They ended the year on a seven game losing streak. During the offseason, the team worked on adding to their depth by adding a total of nine transfers.

"The biggest thing for me was we knew that, in the spring of last year, we had a lot of issues that we needed to address with our roster," Rogers said.

Despite many high scoring games last season, the Red Wolves often ran out of gas in the second half due to fatigue and lack of depth.

This was compounded late in the season after star point guard Izzy Higginbottom went down with an injury. The Red Wolves dropped seven straight and did not win a game of the Sun Belt Conference tournament.

Higginbottom transferred to the Arkansas Razorbacks, and guard Lauryn Pendleton, the team leader in steals last season and a 1,000-point club member, transferred to Alabama A&M. A-State now has an almost completely new



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Shaunae Brown playing defense during a Red Wolves women's basketball practice.

roster from last year with only three players, guards Crislyn Rose and Wynter Rogers, and forward Anna Griffin returning from last year's squad.

"The style of play is going to be completely different, and I love it, because this is what I always wanted to do," Rogers said. "So hats off to my staff for putting in the work to help me bring these players here."

The Red Wolves maintained experience from last year's roster while adding other veterans

from the portal. The Lady Wolves added transfers Kyanna Morgan, Kennedie Montue,

Coach Rogers highlighted the challenges and rewards of integrating nine new players into the team, emphasizing the positive impact on the team's overall performance.

"We brought in nine new players and they all bring something different to the table. I like how athletic we are. I think we shoot it way better. We have the ability to break

people down off the bounce, and we have a lot of three level scores. And the way that we're going to play, it's important that you have that," said Rogers.

Rogers said that this year's transfers completely changed the identity of the team. This year's team has more to play for than ever before.

Notable transfers include junior guard Zyion Shannon, who transferred from Tennessee State after leading the Tigers in three-pointers and was the

second-highest scorer for the team. Senior guard Lezhauria Williams transferred to A-State from Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville, where she played well over 32 appearances with the Cougars.

Shaunae Brown, a senior guard from and graduate student in communications from Toronto, Ontario said she is close to reaching a personal goal.

"I'm really close to getting my 1000 points, so that's been a goal of mine, and I just want to continue to just improve upon my leadership skills, and just try to be the best version that I can for my team."

Brown said, as a grad student, she felt it is important she take a more leadership role while using her experience to be a voice on the floor of her teammates.

She transferred to Arkansas State from CSU-Bakersfield for her last year of eligibility, seeking a home-like environment and the opportunity to reach the NCAA tournament. "I wanted to be in a position where, for my last year, I could have fun, but also know that I'd have an ability to try to get to the NCAA tournament," Brown said.

Wynter Rogers, a redshirt junior forward from Little Rock, Arkansas is a returning face for the Red Wolves.

She emphasized the importance of working out at

the gym, which has boosted her confidence on the court.

"I feel like I've gotten more confidence in myself just putting in the work. My shooting has gotten a lot better. And, you know, just my skill level as well. I've been getting to the gym a lot," Rogers said.

Rogers expressed her commitment to giving her all in every game and contributing to the team's success.

"Personally just being the best version of myself and the best version, I said, for my teammates out there on the court," Rogers said. "Just going out there and, you know, just giving them my all every single game, you know, no matter what, and do whatever I can help the team win."

Rogers also said to expect a much different version of the Red Wolves than last year's team.

"You're going to see us look a lot more mobile, a lot more physical, a lot faster. We're going to press a lot. We're going to play fast on the offensive side. And I think it's just going to be an exciting brand of basketball to watch," Rogers said.

The Red Wolves open the season on the road at Western Michigan Nov. 11. The first home game of the season is Nov. 13 against Mississippi Valley State.

Red Wolves win Homecoming game vs South Alabama, 18-16

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Arkansas State played their first conference game of the season Saturday against South Alabama. Since 2012, the Red Wolves and Jaguars had each won 6 games against each other.

Arkansas State broke the tie with an 18-16 victory. The Red Wolves now have their longest home winning streak since 2019-20. Arkansas State has become the second team over the last three years since 2022 in the Sun Belt conference team to hold South Alabama to 16 points or less.

The Red Wolves special teams defense played a pivotal part in this matchup. Both teams struggled to score in the first half, and kicker Clune van Andel finally broke the scoreless tie in the first quarter by kicking a 20-yard field goal, which deflected off one of the uprights and managed to squeak through for 3.

Van Andel would kick another field goal before the end of the half, and by halftime the red Wolves held a 6-3 lead.

The Red Wolves would kick one more field goal, but the next drive for South Alabama would see the first touchdown of the game. A blown coverage led to South Alabama wide receiver Jammal Pritchette being wide open for a 75-yard receiving touchdown.

The Red Wolves defense held off another Jaguars

drive, and quarterback Jaylen Raynor then led A-State on a 10-play, 58 yard touchdown drive. The Red Wolves took a 15-10 lead with six minutes left when Raynor threw a five yard touchdown to tight end Tyler Little. A-State failed on the two-point conversion.

South Alabama was able to regain the lead 16-15 when South Alabama quarterback Gio Lopez threw a 26-yard touchdown to WR Jammal Pritchette at the end of a 10-play, 80 yard drive.

Van Andel kicked the game winning field goal at the end of the game. Van Andel's kick was at the end of a 10-play, 60-yard drive that lasted one minute and 30 seconds. Raynor completed 6 straight to start the drive and ended it 6/7 for 61 yards.

Quarterback Jaylen Raynor threw 30/39 on passing for 345 yards for a touchdown. WR Corey Rucker led the game with 8 receptions for 172 yards. Linebacker Charles Willekes led the team in tackles with 12 and Justin Parks also had 11 tackles. Parks also recorded a big interception in the red zone. Safety Websley Etienne had 5 tackles.

Clune Van Andel was 4/4 on field goals, including a 34 yard field goal for the win. Punter Ryan Heicher had a big day, punting five times for 233 yards. He pinned the Jaguars inside the 20 three times.

South Alabama came to Jonesboro averaging 59 points

per game, and had a 2-3 record, with the Jags only wins being blowout wins against Northwestern State (0-4) and Appalachian State (2-2)

"I feel like...we just executed at such a high level. I feel like we're really limited to a lot of explosives. And you see, the only time they just scored the touchdown was off a long pass, you know, we made them a dime for a lob down the field," Parks said.

Offensively the Red Wolves did not find a rhythm till the third Quarter. Quarterback Jalen Raynor discussed some of the struggles of not converting inside the red zone.

"Once we get inside the 20s, we've got to score touchdowns. Take the pressure off the defense. We're getting out, we're getting down, we're doing well, give it down at the end of the day, we have to score touchdowns. Three points. This is not going to be enough for the game that we're going to play in conference," Raynor said.

Butch Jones said he was pleased with his players' performance, emphasizing the critical plays and limiting the turnovers.

"Defensively, just a great effort. But when you really look at the critical stretches, critical moments, critical stats, whatever you want to look at, it always starts with the double positive, and we were able to win the double positive. We did not turn the football over



Photo by Abigail Leggett | Staff Photographer

The Red Wolves celebrate a touchdown from TE Tyler Little.

on offense, and we were able to generate one turnover, and then we won the explosive play battle, four plays to three," Jones said.

Jones said he had mixed feelings about red zone efficiency, but was pleased by the lack of turnovers

He said he was also happy with his defense and special teams and how they performed.

"We talked about creating a hot pocket. I thought we were able to do that. And, you know, we knew we had to win this game with effort and strain. And it was really our culture. It was a culture game,

you know, with special teams and mindset and mentality and toughness and playing with great effort, and our players were able to do that," said Jones.

The loss for the Jaguars takes their record to 2-4, with a 1-1 record in conference play. They are now 5th in the Sun Belt West.

The Red Wolves are now 3-2 on the season, and 1-0 in conference. They are currently placed third in the Sun Belt West.

Arkansas State will travel to San Marcos, Texas to take on the Texas State Bobcats on Saturday, October 12.

What's Next:

Opponent: Texas State

Kickoff: Saturday, Oct. 12, 6:00 P.M.

Where: Jim Wacker Field at UFCU Stadium, San Marcos, Tex.

Tune in: ESPN+