

The definition and heart of A-State's brand of football: Corey Rucker Jr.

ERIC FLUKE

SPORTS EDITOR

After finishing up one of the most decorated careers in Arkansas State football history and becoming a heart of both the program and college as a whole, wide receiver Corey Rucker Jr. plans to take his next steps in his journey this weekend at the NFL Draft.

The beginning for A-State's receiving king

Born in Bentonia, Mississippi, Rucker's football path began at Yazoo County High School, where he worked his way to a three-star recruitment ranking from major sports publications such as ESPN and 247Sports. From here, he received multiple offers from Sun Belt Conference schools.

After decommitting from South Alabama following a coaching change and University of Louisiana-Monroe failing to honor his decision to attend, A-State made their offer to Rucker the weekend before signing day, who went ahead and committed following his visit.

"It felt right (and) felt like a good fit for me, so I took a chance on it and rolled with it," Rucker said.

Rucker proved these words right in his first year with the team during a Dec. 5 match-up against one of his former commitments: ULM. He put up 310 receiving yards with four touchdowns on only nine receptions, breaking single-game school records and even an NCAA FBS freshman record for receiving yards.

The rise to greatness

This was only the beginning for A-State's receiving king. Rucker's second year saw major jumps in his production on offense, becoming the team leader in receiving yards and ranking fifth in the SBC with 826. His nine touchdown receptions also led A-State



Photo by Ibuki Hinohara | Former Photo Editor

Corey Rucker Jr. pushes through a group of three Georgia Southern defenders in a 34-24 win against the Eagles in October 2025. Rucker's strength and ability to break through tackles has been noted as one of his biggest upsides to his game.

and were the second most that year in the conference.

Following his success through his freshman and sophomore years, Rucker chose to take his talents to the South Carolina Gamecocks in 2022, but was only able to play two games before injuries sidelined him. After only one season in the Southeastern Conference, he turned right back around to A-State. He said the community he had in Jonesboro was the deciding factor in his choice.

"I think that was something I leaned heavily on and didn't realize it until I was gone and didn't have that community beside me," Rucker said.

Head Coach Butch Jones said this was one of the defining moments of Rucker's character and growth during his years overseeing the wide receiver's development.

"I think it's a great illustration to people of the humility where he leaves and goes to an SEC

program, and he gets there and realizes that (A-State) is a place he needs," Jones said. "He has the fortitude and the humility to call and say, 'I made a mistake and can I come back?'"

In his last three years at A-State, Rucker continued to blossom into one of the greatest wide receivers the program has ever seen. After a small dip in yards and touchdowns in 2023, he followed up with a career high 1053 receiving yards in 2024, breaking the 1000 yard mark for the first time and matching the fourth-most recorded in a single season at A-State.

Not only did he torch the field in the season by itself, but he ended his junior year as the all-time A-State receiving yards leader.

In his senior year at A-State, he finished with 1032 receiving yards, only 21 yards short of his career high set in the previous season. In the final game of his career at the Xbox Bowl,

Rucker gave a huge farewell to the fans with his performance, recording 166 yards with a touchdown on six receptions on his way to winning Offensive MVP of the game.

After all was said and done, Rucker not only holds A-State's receiving yards crown, but stands atop the SBC leaderboard with 4069 yards throughout his career. After his senior year, he also came out on top as the record holder for receiving touchdowns with 27.

What makes Rucker ready for the next step

Beyond the stats and historical moments during his time at A-State, Rucker built himself up not only as a league-ready prospect but as a humble and respected leader with a demeanor that sets him apart from his draft class.

Rucker's strength, versatility, and intelligence will be the skills that set him apart from his fellow prospects in the

upcoming draft. Wide Receivers Coach Derrick Lett said his physical build and ability to work any role as a receiver make him a coveted piece in the draft.

"He ran a 4.3 at 210 pounds (and) is tough to tackle," Lett said. "There's not a thing that Rucker can't do from a receiver standpoint because he runs every single route in the route tree. He does it all."

To Jones, Rucker's football intelligence and ability to adapt will be one of the biggest factors teams will see in him beyond his physical attributes. Jones said his knowledge of the game on and off the field is a competitive advantage.

"He's going to have the ability to go into any organization and pick up on the offensive scheme at a very quick pace," Jones said.

Along with his outstanding football IQ and abilities, Rucker's maturity and development as a person are another major factor in his journey to the draft. One of the most noticeable aspects of his character that continued to grow during his time at A-State is his work ethic.

Lett said Rucker's work ethic is what sets him apart from everyone else and has been one of the major keys to his success.

"We joke about it a lot. Corey Rucker lives in this building," Lett said. "He's getting hit so much. He's averaging 80 snaps a game and he never missed a game because he was relentless on his approach to physical training, therapy, taking care of his body, cold tubs, eating, getting rest, all of that."

Rucker sets an example for the younger players with his efforts, but also continues to act as a leader for the team. Lett said his leadership continued to develop throughout his career and is quiet but evident with how he mentors the rest of his receiving core.

"He's not going to go give a pre-game speech to the whole team," Lett said. "What

he will do is grab a young freshman and say 'You should work this release this way' or 'When they run this kind of coverage, expect the ball here.'"

While leadership may not be needed as a rookie, the ability to take on a smaller role is vital to being a contributor to a team, something that Rucker is willing to do. Jones said he continues to see that willingness to do the dirty work on offense in Rucker and sees that as a factor that will make the receiver a great fit for any team.

"When you're a rookie and you're trying to make your mark in any organization, you've got to be willing to do the little things of what it takes to win football games," Jones said.

Rucker's passion for A-State

Rucker may be ready to take on the next chapter of his career in the NFL, but he said he will never forget the program that helped him develop into the person he has become. After the draft process is finished, he said he plans to move back to Jonesboro sometime in the future and even hold a kids camp for the city.

Jones said Rucker's connection to the city and his growth into the role of one of A-State's greatest representatives has been one of the most fulfilling parts of aiding his development.

"I think he's one of the best ambassadors that we have, not only for Arkansas State football, but for Arkansas State University and the Jonesboro community," Jones said. "I don't know if I've ever been part of another player so willing and giving of his time within our community."

No matter where any team takes him in the country, one thing is for certain about Rucker. He will always represent A-State as one of the best players and people that this community has to offer.



PHOTO COURTESY OF A-STATE ATHLETICS

Corey Rucker Jr. carries the reception while being chased down by a Southern Miss defender. In the 27-21 loss to the Golden Eagles, Rucker hauled in 123 yards on seven receptions.

SNAPSHOTS

Championship week for women's golf!



PHOTO COURTESY OF A-STATE ATHLETICS

Sofia Bastidas sets up her putt at the Sun Belt Conference championship. The women's golf team is in eighth place after the second round of the conference championships. Bastidas is tied with Mackenzie Cloutier for 28th place individually at 150.

Red Wolves win big at the Alumni Classic Invitational!

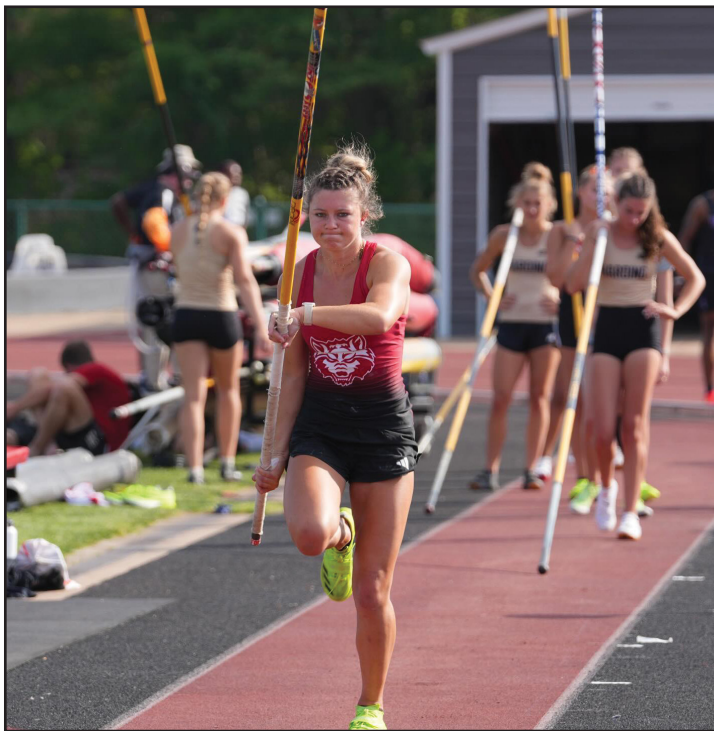


PHOTO COURTESY OF A-STATE ATHLETICS

Pole vaulter Katharina Chaloupka sprints and prepares to plant her pole for her jump. She placed seventh in the event at a high of 3.21m while her teammates Carly Pujol (4.21m) and Kayla Grace Ryan (4.01m) rounded out the top three at first and third.



PHOTO COURTESY OF A-STATE ATHLETICS

Thrower Menacham Chen winds up his arm to throw in the men's discus event. His teammate Jared Boyd placed just ahead of him in the event in second place with a throw of 51.62m while he placed third with a throw of 50.39m.

UCA pitching woes give A-State season high 16 run inning

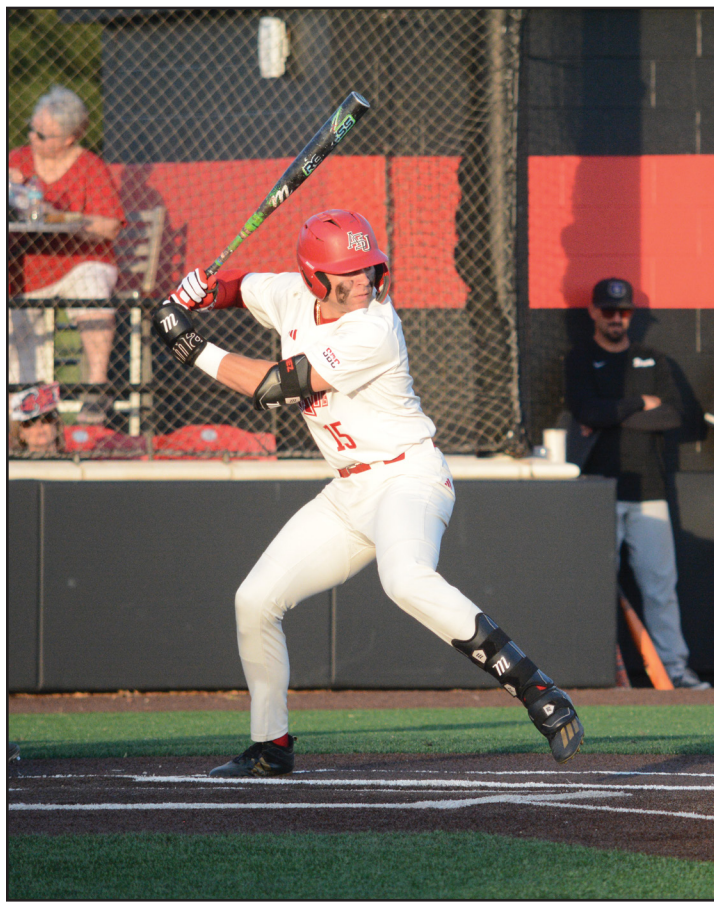


Photo by Soeoyong Choi | Photo Editor

Catcher Derek Martinez prepares his swing against the UCA pitching. He ended up with two RBI and three runs in the game.

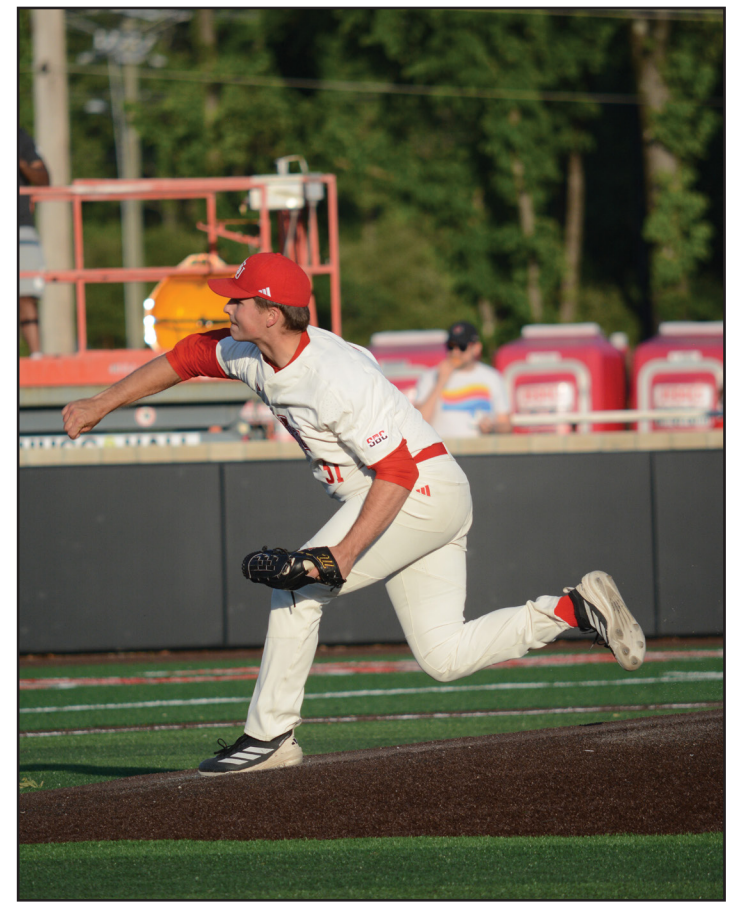


Photo by Soeoyong Choi | Photo Editor

Pitcher Collin Maloney finishes the release of his pitch. Maloney ended the match with three strikeouts in 2.0 IP.

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Arkansas State baseball dominated on offense with their highest scoring game of the season against the University of Central Arkansas.

In a run-rule decision at the bottom of the seventh, the Red Wolves ended with 20 runs Tuesday, including 16 in the fourth inning alone.

Coming off a cooled down weekend at-bat against University of Louisiana-Monroe, A-State poised themselves to bounce back in a match against an in-state rival. UCA came out with a two RBI homer at the top of the first, marking two of three earned runs given up by starting pitcher Collin Maloney.

Maloney's early struggles continued from here, giving up another run in the third inning before getting swapped out for backup Jelle van der

Lelie. Lelie held down the mound for the fourth inning, being one of two pitchers from A-State's bullpen to not give up any hits in the game.

While both Maloney and the backups let up 10 runs in the match, their weaknesses paled in comparison to the collapse from UCA's pitching room. Starting pitcher JB Williams limited the A-State batting to only three hits and three runs through the first three innings.

In those periods, third baseman Cougar Cooke hit an RBI single that gave shortstop Patrick Engskov the green light to score from second base while right fielder Evan Griffis smashed a homer out of the park to bat in two runs. The game stayed in reach going into the fourth with the Bears leading 5-2, but that would quickly change in favor of the Red Wolves.

While UCA went scoreless to start off the inning, A-State

quickly loaded the bases up. The Bears' pitching fell apart at the seams at this point as they allowed three HBP walks, giving up three runs to the Red Wolves on errors alone. Even after swapping through four different pitchers in the fourth, the same mistakes plagued UCA's mound, giving up another HBP walk and allowing runners to steal bases three times.

By the time the Bears got the final out of the fourth, A-State went through their batting rotation twice and scored a season high 16 runs in a single period. The Red Wolves scored more in this inning alone than the entire past weekend in Monroe and the most in an inning since 2011.

First baseman Cason Campbell, second baseman Lane Walton, and Cooke all hit three RBI here with Walton and Cooke tying for a game high four with Bears third baseman Jack Runsick.

Following the complete collapse in the fourth, the Bears' offense avoided the run rule decision in the fifth with two runs and three in the sixth while A-State stagnated at-bat. However, the same pitching mistakes spelled the end of the game at the bottom of the seventh as A-State continued to take advantage of UCA's struggles.

Cooke and pinch hitter Cross Jumper filled the bases following two walks and a stolen base when Walton hit his fourth RBI of the game to send the third baseman and the Bears home.

With this win against UCA, the Red Wolves are 10 games above .500 for the first time in 14 years. A-State is back in Louisiana this weekend to face off against the Ragin' Cajuns for another conference series match-up.

A-State alum nears top of RBI rankings in the MLB



PHOTO COURTESY OF AP PHOTO

Liam Hicks high-fives one of the Marlins' coaches as he runs past the bases. Hicks currently has 21 RBIs so far in his second MLB season, putting him at sixth for total RBIs on the year in the league. He played at A-State for two years in 2020 and 2021 after transferring from Mineral Area College.