



ERIC FLUKE

SPORTS EDITOR

For the first time in program history, Arkansas State will have a player appear in the Major League Baseball (MLB) World Series championship with Tampa Bay Rays catcher Liam Hicks.

Collegiate beginnings

After traveling to the United States from Canada to begin his baseball career, his first stop along the way to his eventual World Series destination was at Mineral Area College in Park Hills, Missouri.

Hicks made a name for himself at the Missouri junior college, hitting 21 home runs and driving in 87 runs over two seasons in 2018-2019. A-State had him on its radar, and after a stellar sophomore year, the Red Wolves gave him the chance to move up to Division I.

During his visit to A-State, Hicks immediately noted the culture between the players and coaching staff, citing it as one reason he committed to the Red Wolves.

"I just really bonded with them over my visit," Hicks said. "I had a great time and felt like it was a good fit for me."

A-State offered him plenty of playing time, which helped sway him to commit to the program in 2020. Even with shortened seasons due to the COVID-19

pandemic and a senior-year injury, Hicks made a major impact for the Red Wolves during his two seasons in Jonesboro.

In 59 games for A-State, Hicks hit 11 home runs and drove in 40 runs, delivering a solid performance in every opportunity. By the end of his collegiate career, he hit .340 and cracked A-State's top ten in all-time batting average, cementing his place in the program's history books.

Welcome to the big leagues

When it came time for Hicks to make his way to MLB, his decorated resume from both Mineral Area and A-State was enough for the Texas Rangers to select him in the ninth round of the 2021 draft. He started in the minor leagues, but slowly built his professional career with the playing time he got.

"I started off in the minor leagues not being a guy that played every day," Hicks said. "I was trying to stay ready and take advantage when I got those opportunities."

His patience and work eventually paid off at the 2023 Arizona Fall League, where his consistent at-bat approach in college translated to the pros as he led all players in batting average at .449 and ranked third overall in hits with 31.

Hicks' performance there garnered interest from other

MLB teams, and the Miami Marlins eventually picked him up. In South Beach, he finally got his moment to live out every kid's dream and made his MLB debut in 2025. He took advantage of his first year as a pro, making his presence known on the team, by playing in 119 games, slamming 6 home runs and driving in 45 RBIs.

The eventful breakout year

Going into his second year, Hicks faced big changes at both the professional and personal levels.

Despite being out of the Marlins' opening-day starting lineup, he still became a major component of the starter core as the season progressed, becoming their main catcher. His value continued to rise until it eventually began to pique interest in the trade market.

As the 2026 trade deadline approached, the Tampa Bay Rays grasped the chance to boost their at-bat power with a consistent hitter and traded for Hicks on Aug. 3.

While trades can be a rocky shift for players, Hicks saw a great opportunity to further push his career forward.

"Luckily, I got traded to a team that was already in first place in their division with a bunch of really good guys in the clubhouse, so it made the transition really easy," Hicks said.

By providing support with batting, Hicks contributed to a deep postseason run that has now led to a World Series appearance.

The chance to make it two rings

While his professional journey continues on an upward trajectory, Hicks also reached a major life milestone in January: his engagement to his fiancée Kirsten.

Since his minor league years, Kirsten has supported everything Hicks has done. From making long trips to his games to moving when his career moved to another team, Hicks praises her for all the hard work she does to cheer him on and for relieving the stress of the pros.

"It's really cool to look back at all of that now (that I'm in) the big leagues," Hicks said. "It's really nice to come back and be able to put baseball away and have her to hang out with and get your mind off of the game."

While chasing a World Series ring, Hicks planned for a different kind of ring so he could celebrate both accordingly when the time comes.

"We're not getting married til next year, so we've had a lot of time to settle in and plan things out," Hicks said. "It would be a little more stressful if we were getting married this offseason with the World Series, but luckily, we have another year."

The Jonesboro connection Even in the face of the most prestigious competition in baseball, Hicks takes time to look back on the community he spent his final college years with. As A-State and Jonesboro promote and celebrate his success, he takes their support as a badge of honor.

"(Kirsten) will show me all the articles and stuff that they post, so it's really good motivation seeing that I still have people that are cheering me on," Hicks said.

Hicks and Kirsten also make a yearly trip to Jonesboro to visit her family and feel the support when he returns, especially from A-State.

"A-State's always been really good with allowing me to come back, use the facilities, and really showcase that they're proud of me," Hicks said.

When it comes to giving back to his support system in Arkansas, Hicks wants to eventually return and share the same level of support he received from the community.

Lessons from Tomlinson Stadium

From A-State to one of the biggest stages in American sports, Hicks' time as a member of the Red Wolves taught him vital character skills he still uses as a professional in MLB.

One moment that taught Hicks a valuable lesson for his future career came during his

senior-year injury. While being injured, his drive to better himself reminded him of the importance of each day he is physically able to put in work.

"I (learned to) never take things for granted," Hicks said. "I did a really good job in college of doing a little bit every day to get better and eventually it adds up to becoming the player you are in the present day."

To keep true to his daily routine of improvement, Hicks' teammates provided a source of inspiration, helping him stay on track with his training and serving as part of his excellent support system.

"It's really cool to have those guys supporting me now," Hicks said. "We would stay late after practice and hit extra. It really pushed me to become a better player."

Although his priorities are focused on a bigger stage than the city of Jonesboro, Hicks has shown that no matter where his MLB journey takes him, he continues to cherish his ties to this community and the university where his collegiate career took off.

"I wouldn't be here (today) if I wasn't able to play (at A-State) and get that experience," Hicks said.



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In a grudge match between two winless Sun Belt Conference (SBC) West teams, Arkansas State football nipped their two game losing streak in the bud with a 23-13 win against the Southern Miss Golden Eagles Saturday.

Both programs came into Hattiesburg hungry for their first win in SBC play coming off tough losses. Riding the wave of their high-scoring shootout with South Alabama last week, A-State came out swinging, scoring on their first three possessions to create a 13-0 lead.

Even with their hot start, the Red Wolves fell into a similar trap from their game against the Kennesaw State Owls in mid-September.

Although A-State made substantial progress downfield with 23 first down conversions, they failed to execute in crucial scoring positions, often settling for a field goal. On the first five possessions, they made their way within the Golden Eagles' 30-yard line four times and only scored one touchdown.

It was the same story during their match against the Owls in Jonesboro earlier this season. Head coach Butch Jones said the negative yardage plays against Kennesaw crippled them on execution and promised to work to take advantage of possessions with great field position in future matches.

"The consistency to execute over drives is something that we have to get better at," Jones said.

A-State's lack of execution on potential touchdown possessions in Southern Miss territory took plenty of Red Wolves' opportunities for points off the board. The extra points would have created a more comfortable lead for the team, especially with the scoring drought that opened the second half and lasted until the 13:10 mark in the fourth quarter.

However, the offense succeeded in controlling the game overall.

A-State's first down efficiency safeguarded their lead by keeping the ball away from the Golden Eagles' offense even while missing out on potential touchdown opportunities.

This consistency in advancing field position came from their slow and methodical offensive scheme.

Considering the Golden Eagles lead the Football Bowl Subdivision in most rushing yards allowed per game, A-State running backs battered at their defense with a season-high 51 carries averaging 2.6 yards per attempt. The small but substantial ground game gains pushed the Red Wolves up the field at a slow and consistent rate, draining the game clock further.

On the other hand, quarterback Trey Owens took a backseat on passing with 25 throws compared to 43 against South Alabama last week. While



PHOTO COURTESY OF A-STATE ATHLETICS
Quarterback Trey Owens reads the defense to find an open man for a pass. Owens put up 170 yards with a 68% completion rate against the Southern Miss Golden Eagles.

not being the offensive focus, Owens still made the most of his passes and averaged ten yards per completion without an interception. His clean performance came from his emphasis on short throws, which propelled the offense's work on maintaining possession as long as possible.

This ball-hog strategy on offense gave them complete control over the tempo. They had possession of the ball for 40:08

minutes, over double the amount of time Southern Miss spent on offense.

On defense, each forced turnover and punt from negative yardage plays pushed the Red Wolves closer to the win. By controlling the tempo on offense, A-State worsened the impact of each mistake from the Golden Eagles' offense, which ended up happening often throughout the game.

Trying to keep Southern Miss

at bay, the Red Wolves defense stepped up after giving up 56 points last week. On the ground, A-State held the home team to only 81 rushing yards.

Meanwhile, the secondary had an excellent outing against Golden Eagles quarterback Landry Lyddy. After a drought lasting since Sept. 12, A-State finally nabbed their first two interceptions since their home opener against West Georgia. However, they showed lapses by

giving up 208 passing yards.

The defense put together multiple great stops outside of their takeaways as well.

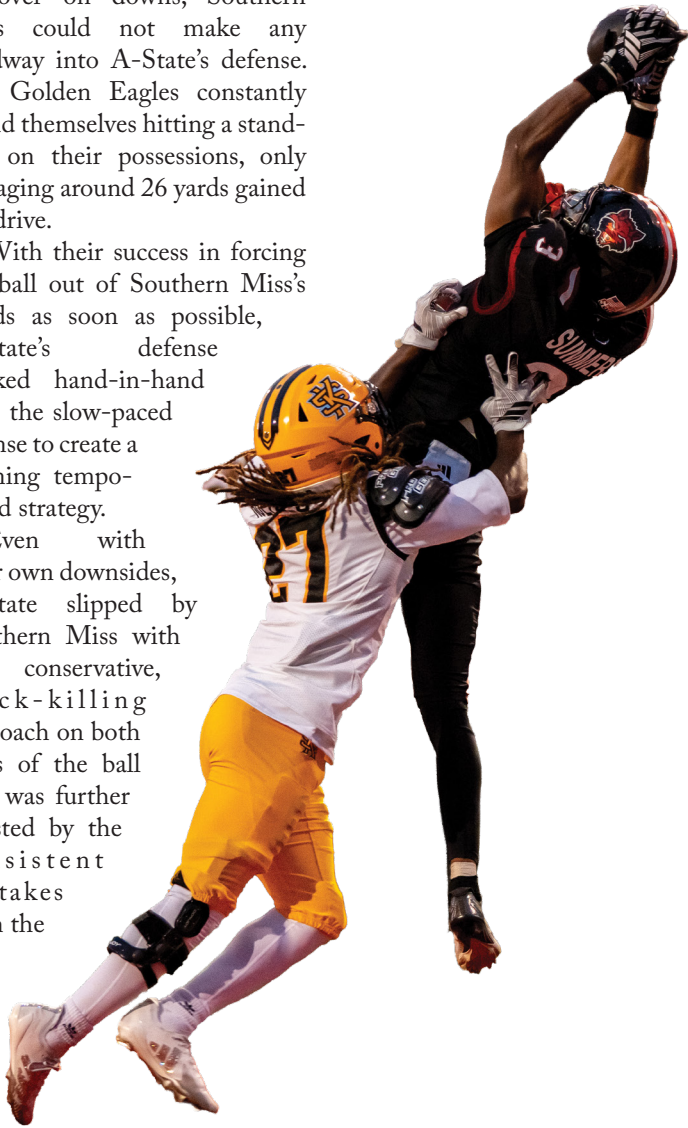
From a pass-breakup cutting a series off early to a negative yardage rush play forcing a turnover on downs, Southern Miss could not make any headway into A-State's defense. The Golden Eagles constantly found themselves hitting a standstill on their possessions, only averaging around 26 yards gained per drive.

With their success in forcing the ball out of Southern Miss's hands as soon as possible, A-State's defense worked hand-in-hand with the slow-paced offense to create a winning tempo-based strategy.

Even with their own downsides, A-State slipped by Southern Miss with a conservative, clock-killing approach on both sides of the ball that was further boosted by the consistent mistakes from the

home team.

The Red Wolves return to Jonesboro for their homecoming game against the Georgia State Panthers on Oct. 24th at 6 p.m.



Red Wolves sweep Georgia Southern in weekend series



PHOTO COURTESY OF A-STATE ATHLETICS
Setter Erin Madigan sets up the ball for her teams to attack. Madigan earned Sun Belt Conference Defensive Player of the Week with 20 digs on Friday's match against Georgia Southern.

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Arkansas State volleyball extended their winning streak to four after a weekend series sweep of the Georgia Southern Eagles this past Friday and Saturday.

Opening the match on Friday, the Eagles dominated the first set of the series winning 25-16, with A-State's loss being clearly defined by one reason.

Outside hitter Kaitlin Whitlock racked up three attack errors while only bringing in two kills. Whitlock leads the team in kills and is an offensive force for the Red Wolves, so such a poor display hurt the team tremendously in this set.

Another factor was Eagles outside hitter Reagan Barth, who slammed eight kills in the starting set. Behind her, Georgia Southern put up an offensive performance that A-State could not keep up with.

The game shifted in the second set however the Eagles' star began to slow down. Two A-State players, right-side hitter Addison Collum and outside hitter Devyn Lewis, saw the opportunity and began to ramp up their attack. A-State's defense also began to put pressure on the Eagles, forcing them to commit six errors on offense that helped propel A-State to a 25-18 win in the second set.

Keeping up their pace from

the previous win, A-State pushed that momentum in the third set. Lewis put up three kills which, combined with defensive plays, led to an early 6-2 lead.

However, A-State lost this lead after Georgia Southern went on a 5-0 scoring run that left the score 10-8. The teams fought closely after this, but A-State had several errors that they could not afford. These mistakes ended up handing the set to Georgia Southern on top as A-State dropped set two 25-22.

With A-State facing a 2-1 hole, they made sure to keep the fourth set as close as possible as neither team could develop a meaningful lead, eventually bringing the set to a 22-22 tie.

A-State continued to have far more errors than they could afford while Georgia Southern's offense stagnated.

However, Collum delivered with nine kills and an ace, giving the Red Wolves just enough gas to push past the Eagles. Collum sealed the set victory after recording three kills to break the tie and end the match with a 25-22 Red Wolves win.

The final set of the night began in a similar stalemate to the previous series. The Eagles led by a single point but couldn't extend their lead. The Red Wolves took over in the end, winning the set 15-11 and taking the first match in five series.

Part of the struggle that led to a hard fought match was Whitlock's performance. It was Whitlock's worst game of the season. Her hitting percentage hit a season-low -.002 with only eight kills on 49 attacks while her nine errors was her worst total so far this year.

Fortunately for the Red Wolves, Whitlock was back to her usual self in the second game of the weekend, leading to a much more dominant offensive outing.

A-State started slow in both the first and second sets before outpacing the Eagles to win both series before Georgia Southern hit 20 points, with Collum once again leading the offensive charge.

However, the third set brought a change of pace for the day.

A-State established an early lead in the third set but lost it as Georgia Southern's offense left the Red Wolves in the dust with a 20-14 lead. It wouldn't take long until Whitlock and Collum closed the gap, slamming five kills to bring the score to 21-20.

Despite this explosive comeback, Georgia Southern began to pull away again. Before the Eagles could take the set, the Red Wolves went on a five point scoring run, taking the final set 26-24.

Although Whitlock's slump in the first match almost cost them the game, it seemed to give Collum the opportunity she needed to establish herself.

Collum had 50 total attacks in the first match, her highest of the season. Even more impressive, 27 of those attacks were kills, matching the highest from an A-State player in a single match since 2021.

Although her performance did slow down during the second match, she still had a game-high 18 kills. This incredible offensive display hopefully acts as a foundation for future performances from Collum.

A-State keeps their second place ranking in the Sun Belt Conference West division as they visit Hattiesburg for a weekend series against the Southern Miss Golden Eagles on Oct. 22-23.



PHOTO COURTESY OF A-STATE ATHLETICS
Former A-State catcher Llam Hicks swings at a pitch. His career batting average for the Red Wolves ranks within the top ten in program history and his consistency at -bat has made him a valuable asset to MLB teams.

