Tech falls in NCAA regional

By Nishant Prasad
Senior Staff Writer

The baseball team’s season came to an end last week, as the Jackets fell in the championship game of the NCAA Atlanta Regional and failed to move on to the Super Regional round. The Jackets, ranked No. 13 in the nation heading into the tournament, finished the year 58-19-1 with an 18-12-1 mark against ACC foes.

Tech was one of 16 teams that earned the right to host an NCAA Regional from May 29-June 1. The Jackets were the No. 1 seed in the four-team field that included No. 2 Elon, No. 3 Southern Mississippi and No. 4 Georgia State, and they were favored to win the double-elimination tournament.

However, the opening game showed that the other teams would not fall easily. Southern Miss and Elon battled in a shootout that lasted well over three hours; the teams combined for 32 runs, 54 hits and 11 homers as Southern Miss came out on top 17-15. In Friday’s night game, though, Tech looked strong as well in dispatching Georgia State 9-3. Sophomore pitcher Deck McGuire went seven strong innings, and freshman third baseman Matt Skole hit a fifth-inning grand slam to power the offense.

After Elon eliminated Georgia State with a 4-3 win on Saturday afternoon, Tech looked to secure a spot in the championship game by beating Southern Miss. The Jackets had problems defensively and committed five errors and the Golden Eagles capitalized on each one. A four-run ninth inning was not enough to bring Tech back, and the Jackets fell 10-7.

The loss meant that Tech would have to play two elimination games on Sunday to stay alive. The first came against Elon in a battle between two of the nation’s most prolific offenses, and Tech knocked out the Phoenix with an 8-4 victory. The Jackets overcame a rough start by sophomore Zach Von Tersch, who walked seven batters in three innings pitched, and got five innings of shutdown relief by freshman Mark Pope while using a seven-run second inning to come out on top. In the night game, the Jackets looked strong on all fronts as they took down Southern Miss 10-3 to set up a Monday night rematch for the right to move on to the Super Regional round.

Senior right fielder Luke Murton hit his 20th home run of the season, and eight players had a hit and an RBI; meanwhile, junior starter Andrew Robinson and sophomore reliever Thomas Nichols combined to hold the Golden Eagles’ offense in check.

McGuire took the mound for Monday’s game just two days after throwing 121 pitches against Georgia State, and the Golden Eagles hit him hard in the second. Led by freshman shortstop B.A. Vollmuth, who hit two home runs in the inning, Southern Miss took advantage of a two-out Skole error and put up nine runs in the frame.

Tech, down 11-3 after five innings, managed to close the gap to 11-8 entering the ninth, but they could not complete the comeback, as Southern Miss reliever Collin Cargill held them hitless in the final frame to clinch the Golden Eagles’ first trip to an NCAA Super Regional.

It was Tech’s second consecutive NCAA regional, losing in the championship game both times. They hosted a regional for the first time since 2006.

Softball falls in Super Regional following historic season

By Steven Cappetta
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On May 23 and 24 the women’s softball team played its last two games in what had been a historic season for the Jackets. The No. 14 Jackets dropped both their games in the Super Regionals over the weekend at Mewborn Field to a No. 3 Washington team that went on to win the Women’s College World Series. The Huskies went on to defeat both Georgia and Florida to win the 2009 Women’s Collegiate Championship.

Tech dropped its first game on Saturday 7-4 and again on Sunday 7-0. Junior second baseman Jen Yee provided Tech’s lone score for the weekend as she hit her team-leading 16th home run of the season. The Huskies’ pitcher Danielle Lawrie proved dominant for their team as she allowed only one run on four hits during the first game. In addition, she only walked one and struck out 10 in that first matchup. Lawrie continued her streak into the second day as she gave up just three singles, did not walk a batter, struck out eight, and hit two home runs for Washington.

Even with Tech’s loss and coming up short for the College World Series, the Jackets have accomplished a great deal over the course of the season. The women’s team just finished with its best season in program history by finishing with its highest ranking in the national polls. The Jackets finished 13th in both the final NFCA and ESPN.com top 25 polls in addition to 12th in the RPI, all of which are program bests.

In the preseason coaches’ poll the Jackets were predicted to be third in the ACC, but went on to win both the regular season and tournament title. Tech finished 17-3 in conference play and won all seven league series. Under head coach Sharon Perkins’ direction the Jackets have won three conference championships over the past three years.

In retrospect, Tech’s season brought on a new softball dynasty at Mewborn Field, another ACC title, Tech’s best end-of-season ranking and the program’s first Super Regional appearance in a Super Regional.

The Jackets had a number of notable individual performances as well. Yee and senior first baseman Whitney Haller were both named third-team All-Americans, and Haller was named to the All-Sports Network’s All-American team by both Baseball America and ESPN’s The Magazine. Zee will return for her senior season when the season begins next February.