**2009 Men’s Tennis Team Preview**

By Steven Cappetta, Assistant Sports Editor

The men’s tennis team travels to Athens this weekend to open the season at the Southern Intercollegiate Championships. They will also host the Georgia Tech Fall Invitation in two weeks from Oct. 3-5. The Jackets did not have any seniors last season, so the team will not have to worry about any potential drop-off in talent. Junior Guillermo Gomez has led the way for the Jackets on the court in his first two seasons, going 25-14 overall in singles and ending last season with a No. 12 national ranking. While playing in Tech’s No. 1 position, he went 12-6 in dual-match play. He was a top-16 seed in the NCAA Singles Tournament over the summer and reached the round of 32 before falling to Steve Johnson of USC.

Sophomore Kevin King will be another player to follow this year after a strong showing in his first season as a 17-year old freshman. In August, the left-handed King defeated the nation’s top overall junior tennis player, Alexander Domijan, in the fourth round of the USTA National Championships.

King played primarily at the No. 2 position for Tech and went 12-9 during the dual match season. His experience against top collegiate competition early in his career should help him improve in his sophomore season.

Six other players return for the Jackets, including lone senior Austin Roebuck. A quartet of juniors in Doug Kenny, Miguel Muñoz, Eliot Potvin, and Ryan Smith provide the team with a talented lineup on both the singles and doubles fronts, and sophomore Dusan Miljevic will look to improve in his sophomore season.

In addition to not losing anyone from a season ago, Tech has acquired three more players to bolster the squad. Freshman Maicol Ortiz joins the Jackets as the former top-ranked player in Colombia and South America. He finished in the top-10 in 2004 and 2006 at the South American Tennis Championship and held the No. 1 singles ranking in his home country Colombia in the 12, 14 and 16 age groups.

The Jackets’ other freshman this year, Juan Spir, is also from Colombia and was a top junior player in his home country. Spir has reached an ITF Junior world ranking as high as No. 48 in singles play and has earned a total of 56 singles wins, and he has competed in three World Junior Grand Slam events.

Tech acquired a transfer in junior Sean O’Brien from Tennessee. O’Brien was named the Ohio Valley Conference Player of the Year last season as he posted a 19-6 overall singles record and a 12-7 mark in doubles. He had a 17-1 singles record in dual match play at their No. 1 position with an 8-0 record in conference play.

Head Coach Kenny Thorne will be entering his 12th season leading the Jackets. He has a record of 141-116 at Tech and has led his team to eight berths in the NCAA team tournament.

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**Men’s Fall Season Schedule**

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Women's Fall Season Schedule

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This weekend marks the beginning of another season in women's tennis as the Jackets host the Georgia Tech Invitational tournament. The Jackets had a national ranking of No. 8 at the end of the 2009 season and reached the round of 16 at the NCAA Tournament for the fifth straight year.

This will be Head Coach Bryan Shelton's 11th season leading the program. Shelton has guided the team to ten straight NCAA Tournament appearances, two ITA National Indoor championships and the 2007 NCAA Championship.

The departures of Christy Striplin and Noelle Hickey leave only two returning upperclassmen in senior Amanda McDowell and junior Sasha Krupina.

McDowell won the 2008 NCAA Singles championship as a sophomore and is the only returning player from the 2007 national championship team. She struggled early last year, but rebounded to finish strong in singles and doubles. Krupina played mostly at the No. 5 position last year and recorded a 12-10 singles mark in the dual-match season.

The team returns four other players from last year's squad, all of whom are sophomores, in Irina Falconi, Lynn Blau, Hillary Davis and Viet Ha Ngo.

Falconi, who joined the team last season as a five-star recruit, immediately had an impact at Tech as she earned 30 singles wins in her freshman season. She recorded a 16-9 dual-match singles record while competing alongside McDowell in the top two spots in the lineup last season, and in late August she had the opportunity to compete in the U.S. Women's Open wild card round.

Blau will see more action after starting in 11 singles dual matches. She had a 6-5 singles record in the dual season but went 5-0 against conference opponents. Blau had a 10-9 dual record in doubles and saw some playing time alongside McDowell.

Davis ended the tournament season with a 10-4 singles record and finished the fall ranked No. 30 in the ITA South Region. She played doubles alongside Krupina in the dual-match season but never competed in any singles matches during that time.

Ngo saw success in her first season at Tech as she played in the No. 6 spot on the lineup. She ended her first season with a 13-5 dual-match singles record and an overall singles record of 20-11.

Freshman Elizabeth Kilborn will be the new face in Tech's lineup this season. The Marietta, Ga. native led Walton High School to four straight region and state championships as her team went 116-0 during her four years there. Kilborn was rated the No. 2 recruit in Georgia, No. 7 in the Southeast region, and No. 22 in the nation.

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Special from page 24

for an 85-yard touchdown to give the Jackets an early 14-0 lead. Tarrant also had a strong game at corner back; most notably, he deflected a deep pass to Clemson returning back C.J. Spiller on the Tigers' final drive of the game to prevent Clemson from reaching field goal range.

"It just feels good to be able to help my team in big ways like that," Tarrant said.

Another prominent member of the unit, junior kicker Scott Blair, accounted for 18 of Tech's 30 points in the Clemson game. Nine came by way of field goals, but Blair also connected on his first field goal attempt late in the first quarter.

On fourth-and-15, Johnson called a trick play. He called back the offense and sent the field goal unit onto the field with little time on the play clock. In the confusion, no Clemson defenders noticed that Tech junior receiver Demaryius Thomas was on the field near the goal line.

Rather than attempting a 51-yard field goal, Blair took a direct snap and threw to a wide-open Thomas, who broke away from one defender on route to a 34-yard touchdown.

The junior contributed with his leg as well. He had a second-quarter field goal and threw to a wide-open Rice vs. #16 Oklahoma State (-32.5)

#11 Ohio State (-20.5) vs. Toledo
Tulsa vs. #12 Oklahoma (-17)
#19 Nebraska vs. #13 Va. Tech (-4)
Texas State vs. #15 TCU (NL)
Rice vs. #16 Oklahoma State (-32.5)
#17 Cincinnati vs. Oregon St. (pick ’em)
#18 Utah vs. Oregon (-4.5)
Duke vs. #22 Kansas (-22)
#23 Georgia vs. Arkansas (-1)
East Carolina vs. #24 UNC (-7.5)
E. Michigan vs. #25 Michigan (-24)

* Mississippi and Penn State tied for No. 5 in this week’s national AP poll.

Staff Picks

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Clemson points in between to go up 12-5. Mead ended the match with a service ace to win the set and match for the Jackets.

The balanced attack was key for the Jackets, but they made a number of attack errors. A strong defensive effort also helped make up for the errors, though. Junior libero Jordan McCullers notched a career-high 25 digs, and the team’s net play was solid.

“In the end, we executed, and that’s what we’ve been talking about...finishing the game, finishing the match,” Johnson said.

The victory gave the Jackets an early edge in the conference standings. They now sit atop the conference at 1-0 in ACC play.

“We had 25 more points because we want to be 1-0 and on top of the ACC...To be on the top for two weeks and sitting golden is definitely nice for us...I know a lot of teams that were ranked higher than us will be 0-0 after tonight,” Hunter said.

Tech faced a tough battle the next day against Southeast Missouri State, but the Jackets managed to pull out a victory in four sets (26-24, 22-25, 25-13, 25-20).

The first set was close throughout, with the Jackets and Redhawks ending up tied 13 times in the set. The Jackets pulled ahead at the very end, and Hunter’s seventh kill of the set gave Tech a 26-24 victory and an early lead.

The Jackets won six consecutive points to go up 7-2 in the second set. Down 1-0, SEMO went on a 10-3 run to turn a four-point deficit into a three-point lead, and the Jackets were unable to gain any momentum late in the set as the Redhawks tied the match.

After SEMO pulled ahead 4-3 in the third set, Tech got two kills from DeMichels and two service aces from Mead to power a seven-point run. The Jackets rode that momentum to a 25-13 set victory.

The Redhawks built lead in the fourth set, but Tech battled back to tie the score at 18, then won four straight points. Tech took the final set 25-20 to win the match. The balanced attack was a key to Tech’s victory again. Four players with at least 10kills for the second straight game. Defensive- ly, the team produced 68 digs, led by McCullers 24.

In the tournament finale against Ole Miss, both teams struggled on the attack. The teams combined for 57 attack errors as the visiting Rebels hit .087 and the Jackets hit .176: the offensive struggles were reflected in the teams’ defensive numbers, which included 25 block assists for Tech.

Neither team was able to break away in the first set. Tech held a slim lead for the majority of the set, but Ole Miss caught up at the end and took the first set 25-23.

The Rebels started strong in the second set and built up a 12-8 lead, but Tech fought back to force the set into tiebreak points. With Ole Miss up 28-27, the Jackets won three straight points to take the set and tie the match.

A six-point run put Tech ahead 6-3 in the third set, and a late 8-2 run gave the Jackets a 20-16 advantage. Tech won the set 25-18. In the final set, the Jackets fell behind 8-6 but proceeded to win 17 of the next 22 points. A kill by sophomore middle blocker Asia Stawicki ended the set and the match in favor of the Jackets.

With the wins, the Jackets improved to 7-2 on the season, including a 1-0 mark in ACC play.

Roderick earned tournament MVP honors after contributing on all fronts in Tech’s sweep; she hit .429 for the weekend with 33 kills and seven digs while committing just six attack errors. On Monday, she was also named the ACC Player of the Week and became the second Tech player to win the award this year.

**Volleyball** from page 24

made several early attack errors as the Tigers built a four-point lead. The Jackets went on a late run to close the gap to 24-23, but the Tigers won the final point to tie the match at one game apiece.

“We had momentum because we had won the previous [game], but we just came out flat...When we come out flat in games, teams pounce on us, and we end up getting momentum and coming on strong too late,” Hunter said.

The Jackets led the third set by a 25-16 margin by getting a big lead early on. The Jackets reached set point after blocking three consecutive Clemson attacks for points, and Mead closed out the set with a spike for a kill.

Clemson rebounded and won the fourth set handily to send the match to a decisive fifth set. Tech stayed close early on, but after cutting the Tigers’ lead to 10-8, the Jackets did not win consecutive points in the rest of the set.

In the final set, Tech went down 3-2 but put together two five-point rallies with only two
Volleyball wins Courtyard Classic

By Richard Davis

Tech’s volleyball team followed up the Thursday night football victory over Clemson with a home win of their own over the Tigers, as the Jackets prevailed in five sets (25-21, 23-25, 25-16, 15-25, 15-8) in their first ACC game on Friday night. A day later, the Jackets defeated Southeast Missouri State and Ole Miss to win the Georgia Tech Courtyard Classic as they swept their second home invitational tournament of 2009.

Against Clemson, the Jackets’ offensive balance proved to be key as they held off the Tigers to earn their first ACC victory. Four players finished the match with at least 10 kills, led by sophomore outside hitter Bailey Hunter’s 19. Senior middle blocker Brittany Roderick notched 15 kills and hit a team-high .619 for the match. Senior outside hitter Chrissy DeMichelis and freshman rightside hitter Monique Mead contributed 13 and 12 kills, respectively, and junior setter Mary Ashley Tippins had 57 assists.

“Our (middle hitters) did a heck of a job, and I have to take my hat off to them, because (Tippins) did a really nice job of keeping them involved in the offense, and it was just really nice to see them execute … I’m really proud of our middles for the way they showed up and played tonight,” said Head Coach Tonya Johnson.

“It’s nice that we have a versatile team, and it’s not just one player that’s not just the main hitter for us every time,” Hunter said.

The first set of the match against the Tigers was tightly contested between the two teams. The Jackets’ largest lead in the first set was just five points and their longest rally only lasted for four points, but they won the first set 25-21. Clemson kept the score close, but Tech trailed only once during the opening set and saw strong play from their front line as Roderick, Hunter, and DeMichelis combined for 14 kills in the set.

The Jackets got off to a slow start in the next set, dropping the first three points to Clemson, and they never recovered.

Tippins was named to the all-tournament team.

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Special teams unit demonstrates major improvement

By Nishant Prasad

After the 2008 season, Head Coach Paul Johnson had few positive things to say about the Jackets’ special teams unit. Johnson highlighted special teams as an area in which the team would need to improve dramatically after the team struggled in nearly every aspect last season.

Over the team’s first two games, and particularly in last Thursday’s home victory over Clemson, the Jackets have showed numerous signs of progress throughout the unit. The team has put a great deal of effort into improving their performance on special teams throughout the offseason.

“Every day before practice, we go through special teams, and we watch film on special teams and have meetings. They’ve put more focus on it so we can put more energy into it,” redshirt sophomore cornerback and punt returner Jerard Tarrant said.

Punt returns were an especially troubling area for the Jackets in 2008, as the three Tech players who went back to field punts last season; then-sophomore receiver Tyler Melton, then-freshman A-back Roddy Jones, and then-senior receiver Andrew Smith—combined for an average of just 6.7 yards per return and frequently struggled with fumbles.

The Jackets’ punt return unit received a boost in the offseason with the return of Tarrant, who was slated to be the starting punt returner for the Jackets last season before he received a season-long suspension.

Upon returning, Tarrant won a competition with several others for the job this summer, and the move paid off immediately. When Tarrant returned a second-quarter punt for a touchdown, it marked the first time Tech had scored on a punt return since Jonathan Smith took one back in 2003.

Tarrant confirmed the reports that he had guaranteed he would return a punt for a touchdown in his first game. “I thought about it the whole time in camp…Since it’s been so long, I’ve been talking about it since I came here about returning a punt in my first game,” Tarrant said.

The speedy cornerback had an even better performance in store against Ole Miss. When the Tigers lined up for what would have been a 55-yard field goal attempt in the first quarter, Clemson kicker Richard Jackson took a direct snap and made a pooch punt. Tarrant, playing deep near the end zone, caught the short punt as he approached the Jackets’ 15-yard line with three Clemson defenders immediately in front of him. He evaded all three and ran down the sideline for a 55-yard punt return.

Jerrad Tarrant crosses the goal line for a touchdown after his 85-yard punt return in Thursday night’s home victory over Clemson.

By Steven Cappetta

Tech’s golf team opened its fall season last week in the traditional season-opening Carpet Capital Collegiate in Rocky Face, Ga. The Jackets are ranked No. 11 in the first Golf World magazine rankings and return five letterwinners and three newcomers from last year’s ACC title-winning team.

The Jackets opened the 2009-10 campaign by finishing third at the Carpet Capital Collegiate last weekend. They improved each day of the tournament after finishing in ninth place after Friday and tied for fifth after Saturday.

On the first day of match play, redshirt junior Paul Haley and junior Kyle Scott each shot even-par scores of 72 and were tied for 13th place individually.

Redshirt junior John-Tyler Griffin shot a 3-under-par to push Tech to a second-round total of 2-over 290 as they moved up to tie for fifth place after two days of play.

The last day of the tournament saw Griffin and sophomore Minghao Wang each score a 2-under-par. Four other Jackets finished under par on the day as Tech finished the tournament at three-over-par, moving up to third place to conclude the three-day tournament.

Tennessee took first place over the 11 teams competing, finishing 13-under-par with a total score of 851. Second place went to Chattanooga, which shot one-under-par for the tournament. Auburn finished fourth, posting six-over-par.

Nick Flores of Texas Tech and Darren Fenwick of Tennessee tied for the individual honors at 6-under-par. Haley was Tech’s best individual finisher over the weekend, as he tied for 14th place in even-par.

Tech will be of until next weekend when it will travel to Greensboro, N.C., for the UNC-G BridgeStoner Invitational. The Jackets will look to build on their recent success despite losing two talented seniors in three-time All-American Cameron Tringale and David Dragoos.