

*Coach Destinee Rogers  
and the Lady Red Wolves*

SHOOTING FOR  
NEW HEIGHTS

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY MELISSA DONNER  
AND SUBMITTED BY A-STATE ATHLETICS

The 2024-25 season for the Arkansas State University Women's Basketball Program was historic, with the team becoming the Sun Belt Conference Tournament Champions for the first time in program history, posting the first winning season since 2015-16 and making its first ever NCAA Tournament appearance. Head Coach Destinee Rogers has elevated the program to a new level, and she and her team are ready to up their game even more going into the next season.

GROWING UP ON THE COURT

Rogers began playing basketball when she was just five years old. From summers playing travel ball to drills with her dad and siblings at the park, Rogers says basketball has always played a key role in her life.

"I grew up in a small town in Arkansas called Strong, and there was absolutely nothing to do there, so my dad put a basketball in my hands at the age of five years old," said Rogers. "I just would spend a lot of time outside playing basketball. My dad was a coach, my grandfather was a coach, so I grew up in a family of coaches. I actually did not want to coach when I went to college; however, after going through a couple of classes, my heart found its way back to basketball.

"Basketball has always been a passion of mine. A lot of kids will sit in their house watching TV, but I was always playing basketball with the other kids. My dad would take us to a park and we'd do basketball drills outside when it was really hot, so basketball is all I've ever known. Every summer, we would travel to play AAU basketball, so if I had a summer where I did not have basketball involved, I would not know what to do. Every summer of my life has revolved around basketball. It's life for me, it's a passion of mine, and obviously I hope to do it for a long time."



Rogers' coaching career began at the age of 22 as a graduate assistant at her alma mater, the University of Central Arkansas (UCA). She took pride in what she did and worked hard, and she was intentional about her choices leading up to her time at A-State.

"It was tough, you know you start at the bottom and trying to build your way up," said Rogers. "I had to do a lot of duties that managers do, but I was willing to do it because I really wanted to be in the coaching profession. It was really hard, because you don't make much money and you have to do the jobs that no one wants to do, but I took a lot of pride in doing it because I knew in order to get a promotion or become an assistant, I had to prove myself. If I had to do the laundry, I wanted to be the best person to do the laundry. If I had to go pick up a Diet Coke for my head coach, I wanted to make sure I went and got it and had it on time. Just everything that I did as a young coach, I tried to just be competitive and show that I could be the best at whatever task I was given.

"So, I did that, and after year one, I was promoted to assistant coach, where I was for three years. A cool thing about our story is that I won a championship there as a player, a regular season championship, but they had never been to NCAA either. I got a chance to be an assistant coach and be a part of the team that went to the NCAA for the first time ever, which is what we did here, so I have been a part of that story twice."

After UCA's championship win, Rogers decided she wanted some head coaching experience. She became the girls' basketball head coach at El Dorado High School, where she spent three seasons gaining valuable experience and insight.

"I absolutely love that I took that route, because it taught me so much," she said. "It wasn't college coaching, but it put me in a position to learn how to lead people. It taught me how to lead

young people. I think that was a huge part of my journey that prepared me for now."

Three years into her time there, former A-State women's basketball head coach Matt Daniel called Rogers and asked her to come to Jonesboro and help him build the program at Arkansas State. She worked as an assistant coach for three years; midway through Rogers' third year, Daniel decided to step down, and Rogers took over as interim head coach in the middle of that year. She is now finishing her third official year at A-State as a head coach.

"I played for Matt Daniel, and I believed in his vision, so I wanted to come work for him," said Rogers. "I had never been in Jonesboro a day of my life, but once I got here, I saw how special the community was and I saw how they support Arkansas State. I think we have beautiful facilities, and I think this is a goldmine. That's why I chose to stay here. I truly believe in this university, and I believe you can win at a high level here. Now that I've spent six years here, I understand why people love Arkansas State the way that they do. It's because the community really gets behind the school. It's something that I value, and it's a huge reason why I chose to sign the extension and stay. ...

"My journey has been pretty quick; not a lot of people can say they have become a Division I head coach at the age of 32, so I give a lot of credit to God and the journey He put me on," said Rogers. "It's been a tough journey, but it's been a fun journey, as well. I knew when I was in college, I was a point guard, I always knew I was born to lead. I always knew that I was born to impact the next generation. Coaching is the calling I get to do that through."

NETS AIN'T FREE

"Our motto is, 'Nets Ain't Free,'" said Rogers. "If you want to climb a ladder and cut a net after winning a championship, you have to understand that the net you're going to cut, it ain't free. You've got to work for it every single day, you have to have goals in mind and write them down, but you also have to put action to it. We're firm believers that you're not going to be given anything; everything you receive, not just in basketball, but in life and in the classroom, you have to earn it."

Rogers' Red Wolves have indeed earned it. She is quick to commend three of her players for believing in the program during a difficult time, and she appreciates those who took a chance on the team as seniors.

"We lost our whole team last year, and Anna Griffin, Wynter Rogers and Crislyn Rose chose to come back, even when they had no clue if we were going to win this year or not," said Rogers. "They were going to be a part of a brand-new team. Anna was going into her last year, Crislyn and Wynter had more years, but they still chose to be loyal and stay. The loyalty they had to me and this program means the world to me, to see them climb that ladder and cut that net for the first time, for them to raise that trophy and see all their hard work come to pass.

"We also have seniors that chose to come here for their last year. They took a risk, as well, Shaunae Brown, Kennedie Montue, Kyanna Morgan, Nissa Sam-Grant, they took a chance to come here for their last year, and seeing them climb the ladder and cut the net meant the world to me."

One of those returning players, Wynter Rogers, is the coach's younger sister, a unique opportunity that has been special for both of them.

"Winning the SBC championship means everything to me," said Wynter Rogers. "Our team was hardworking, determined







and locked in all season, and we pushed through every challenge together.

“It’s been so special playing under Coach Dezz. She pushes us to reach our highest potential, leads us with heart and toughness, and shows us every day what it means to be a winner. It was amazing to see all the hard work we put in pay off. And for me personally, it makes it even sweeter that I got to do it alongside my big sister, who’s been a supporter and role model for me my whole life.”

Not only were they loyal to A-State, they were loyal to Rogers as their coach. Rogers is a self-described fiery, passionate head coach, and she is invested in each of her players both on and off the court.

“I think that I’m a players’ coach,” said Rogers. “I have genuine relationships with our kids, but I coach them with a lot of passion. I’m tough on them. I demand excellence, I demand for them to meet a certain standard – a championship standard – every single day. I am the type of coach who will hold you to the fire, but when I do that, I’m also going to come behind you and pick you back up. I’m able to coach my kids the way that I coach them because they know we truly care and we truly love them. ... I love doing what I do, I love motivating them and inspiring them, but I also love pulling up my sleeves and getting to work.”

The players are not the only Red Wolves working to take the basketball program to the next level. Rogers has been a great fit and has helped the team accomplish so much during her six years at A-State.

“(Rogers) possesses the traits that you want in a head coach – leadership, communication skills, intelligence, resiliency, a strong knowledge of the game, the ability to adapt and much more,” said former A-State Athletics Director Jeff Purinton. “You take those personal attributes and add in that she runs a first-class program, cares deeply about the success of her players on and off the court and is a great ambassador of our community, and she is a great fit here at Arkansas State.”

Ever humble, Rogers is thankful for the rest of the elite coaches she says have helped the team accomplish so much recently.

“All the coaches bring something to the table,” she said. “Lizzie Nessling and Rudy Evans are a big part of our offensive and defensive schemes. ... They are a huge part of what you see on the floor. They are also a huge part of the recruiting part of it. Colton Crowder is also a big part of the recruiting and what you see on the floor coaching. When you see those three, they all bring something different to the table, and they work really well together.

“You can’t talk about those three coaches without talking about our Director of Operations, Angelica Alexander; she keeps this whole place together, I never have to worry about it. The kids will always be well taken care of, and everything will be planned out the way it needs to be planned out. This is just a big melting pot of people who are really, really elite at what their job is.”

### MAKING HISTORY

Following an impressive winning season, the Arkansas State Red Wolves women’s basketball team won the 2025 Sun Belt Conference Tournament championship in Pensacola, Fla., on March 10, 2025. They defeated James Madison 86-79 in overtime to claim the program’s first Sun Belt Tournament title and an automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament.

What makes the team’s historic accomplishments that much more impressive was that the team was just starting over. With only three players returning from the previous year, the team had to work to come together and change how they played.

“I am really big on my faith,” said Rogers. “Last year around this time was a big struggle. We lost our whole team and we had to bring in a brand-new team, and I just relied heavily on my faith and God just kept telling me that things were going to work out. I am thankful to God that He put us in a position that we could not only win but produce a championship so that people can see who He is. He took a situation that felt nearly impossible, and He made it possible. I will always give all the glory to God. If He can make a way, I will always tell everybody about what He did for us. That’s a huge part of it.”

Purinton says that the team’s success can be attributed to just how hard Rogers and her team work and how well they’ve come together as Red Wolves.

“Under Destinee’s leadership, our coaching staff and players put together a remarkable season that ended in historic fashion as our women’s basketball program made its first-ever appearance in the NCAA Tournament,” said Purinton. “That unprecedented success, which also included our first Sun Belt Conference Tournament championship, is a testament to their hard work and dedication not only in-season, but during the recruiting process and months leading up to the start of the season. She’ll be the first to tell you that we’re not satisfied, but we’re extremely proud of those accomplishments.”

### A BRIGHT FUTURE

As the team prepares for the 2025-26 season, Rogers is determined to hold her players to a higher standard now that they know what it’s like to cut that net.

“I feel like we are finally to the part where we have built a championship culture,” said Rogers. “I think that we have the right staff in place, not just staff (members) who are really good at their job but are also really good people. We also have really good



*Arkansas State Head Coach Destinee Rogers and the Lady Red Wolves celebrate their Sun Belt Conference Tournament Championship and first ever NCAA Tournament appearance.*

players that understand that what we do is bigger than them and they have to be willing to be a part of the team. I will absolutely say that this was the first year I felt like we had a program that was one unit. While everyone brings different things to the table, everyone is really elite at what they do. When you have that ... special things can start to brew. We took all those and we put it to work, and it birthed a championship.

“That’s something we are looking to continue moving forward. We are still going to have the same staff, but we are looking to add players that fit the players we have coming back. Because the championship culture that we built is a nonnegotiable now, so if you are going to be a part of this, you have to understand what that culture is and accept how we work here.”

Now that the Red Wolves are the team to beat, Rogers says they’ll have to work that much harder to win the next championship.

“You’ve gone from the hunter to the hunted,” said Rogers. “You can’t be satisfied with winning a championship and think that you don’t have to continue to work. Our motto will be the same thing we always talk about: Nets Ain’t Free. If you want another one, you have to work that much harder.

“Because now we are not a surprise to people. They know how hard we play, and they know we’re going to be competitive, so people are going to prepare for us. We have to work that much harder to stay at the top. It’s hard to get to the top, and even harder to stay there. We understand that our work has to go up a level and our intensity has to go up a level, and our players are absolutely bought into that.”

As recruiting season is under way, two new signees have already come on board and are excited to join the Red Wolves’ exciting brand of basketball.

“This year, we are one of 27 teams that did not lose a kid to the transfer portal,” said Rogers. “I think that says a lot about the loyalty of these players. They want to be here, they want to play for us and they want to be a part of this university. And Mia Tarver wanted to come be a part of that. We just got another new commit (Marlie Dickerson), so we are now up to seven and we have a lot of visits happening this week, as well. Mia Tarver is definitely a special kid – she is a three-level scorer. I think the thing that sticks out the most to me is that she plays hard every single possession, and she is going to come in and just be able to plug herself right in to our system and be really good at it.”



New and returning players are counting on fans to continue to support them, just like they did in Pensacola in March.

“Having a brand-new team, the thing we had to establish first was that we had to be one, we had to be a unit, because there were a lot of people who didn’t really believe in what we were doing,” said Rogers. “We knew we were going to play a different way, a new style this year, which was really fast – we press the whole game. So, we had to establish a unit within the group.

“Once the community saw that and how we took off winning, they were able to get behind that. Everyone wants to get behind winners. We knew that we needed to win to get the type of support we knew we could get here. Once we started winning, we saw the community start to rally around us, but the special part that I really saw was how they rallied around us in Pensacola. ... I’m really excited about this upcoming year; I think we are going to have a lot more fans at First National Bank Arena because they saw we play an exciting brand of basketball, and they also know we can win.”

Former Vice Chancellor for Intercollegiate Athletics Jeff Purinton is confident in Rogers’ ability to continue to build up the program after its historic season.

“The bar has certainly been raised and the foundation necessary to build upon our success last season has been laid,” said Purinton. “Obviously, we have great momentum and anticipate a lot of excitement heading into next season. We can’t wait to see our A-State fans back in First National Bank Arena and our team back on the court again. We appreciate the support of our fans and look forward to the continued rise of our women’s basketball program under Destinee’s direction.”

Rogers says that if fans were excited about how the Red Wolves played in Pensacola when they won the 2025 Sun Belt Conference Tournament, the 2025-26 season will be even better.

“We’re bringing in players who are going to elevate the system that we have in place,” she said. “We are still going to shoot a bunch of threes and still get a lot of steals, and score at a high rate, and it’s going to be really fun to watch. I encourage people to come pack out the lower bowl at ‘The Bank.’ We are going to put another really exciting brand of basketball on the floor.”

For tickets and more information about the Arkansas State University Women’s Basketball program, visit [astateredwolves.com/sports/womens-basketball](http://astateredwolves.com/sports/womens-basketball).