

# On paper, ASU women can compete with Florida State



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(Photo: John David Mercer/USA TODAY Sports)

**GREENSBORO, N.C.** -- Don't be too quick to assume Arizona State women's basketball has reached its ceiling and can't beat Florida State tonight in the NCAA Tournament Sweet 16.

Yes, the Sun Devils needed to rally from 16 down Monday to get here and are guilty of playing only half of a game at times then relying on their depth and toughness to pull out close wins, 20 by five points or less or in overtime over the past two seasons.

Chances of winning that way clearly decrease moving up the competition ladder. But ASU is capable of playing a more complete game than it did against Arkansas-Little Rock when first-half turnovers and missed layups led to 21.4 percent shooting and a 26-17 halftime deficit.

"I think taking care of the ball is the most important thing, especially against Florida State," guard **Katie Hempen** said after the UALR game. "They're very defensive-oriented, they're very handsy, they're very athletic. Being able to stay patient on offense, take care of the ball and get a good shot every possession is what's going to help us because then we can set up our defense, and our defense is what wins us games.

"Right now, we're the team that has nothing to lose. Going into the game, I think, we'll be more relaxed and ready to just kick some butt. I hope Florida State saw the game we just played. I hope they scout that game because maybe that's not what we're going to do hopefully. We're similar on defense and offense, we both like to run, so I think it will be a little track meet."

ASU's bench has been a plus almost all season and needs to be again tonight. Point guard **Elisha Davis** must be poised running the offense.

As I wrote in [my advance for the 6:30 p.m. Arizona tip-off on ESPN2 \(http://bit.ly/1EZCyXE\)](http://bit.ly/1EZCyXE), rebounding is essential for ASU since Florida State is No. 3 nationally in rebounding margin (ASU is No. 42).

Seminoles 6-4 center **Adut Bulgak** averages 12.3 points/9.7 rebounds. ASU's starting posts are 6-1 **Sophie Brunner** and 6-0 **Kelsey Moos** with 6-4 **Quinn Dornstauder** available off the bench.

Dornstauder and Bulgak were Canadian Senior National teammates last summer at the Jones Cup in Taiwan.

"She's a talented player," Dornstauder said. "She's super athletic and fast and really long. She's a great rebounder. It always makes it more fun when you know somebody you're playing against. I don't think it will make a difference playing-wise, but it's a different experience. Rebounding is a huge focus for us.

"The further and further you get along, the harder and harder it gets. You just have to realize nothing is going to be easy. You really have to bring it every single game. We definitely can't afford to have any more halves like that (against UALR). We got it going in the second half."

Bulgak is a transfer from Trinity Valley Community College in Athens, Texas, where she was MVP in leading her team to the NJCAA Division I national title. ASU guard **Peace Amukamara** was MVP at 2014 NJCAA Division II nationals for champion Mesa Community College.

Of Dornstauder, Bulgak said, "I know a little bit (about her play) but then again, we've been playing Division I basketball for six, seven months without playing on the same team. So, I'm pretty sure she's developed in areas I don't know about just like I've developed my game. So, it was be a little surprise."

ASU (29-5) was No. 9 in the Associated Press final top 25, two spots behind Florida State (31-4). In the final regular-season NCAA ratings percentage index, ASU was No. 13 and Florida State No. 8. In Sagarin strength of schedule, ASU is No. 43 and Florida State No. 63. The Seminoles are a No. 2 NCAA seed, ASU No. 3.

Statistics don't scream that there is a huge gap between these teams. The Seminoles come out 5.5 points ahead on a neutral court using Sagarin predictor numbers.

Four of ASU's losses were by six points or less with the other by 11 to Pac-12 regular-season champion Oregon State. Brunner sees Florida State as "a mixture of Stanford and Oregon State."

That mix is personified by the blending of transfers **Leticia Romero** (from Kansas State), **Maegan Conwright** (Kentucky), **Emiah Bingley** (Iowa State), **Shakena Richardson** (Rutgers) and Bulgak to a school record for victories.

"It just sharpens everybody on the team," having players from different backgrounds, Seminoles coach **Sue Semrau** said.

Certainly ASU must be at its sharpest to reach 30 wins for only the second time in school history (31 is the record) and reach its third Elite Eight against the winner between No. 1-seed South Carolina (32-2) and No. 4 North Carolina (26-8), tonight's first game at Greensboro Coliseum.

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