Second-ranked Arkansas State begins its 2013 season Saturday in College Station, Texas against Texas A&M. The Red Wolves have had limited outdoor practice time since adjourning for the spring semester, but newly crowned head coach Alex Houser is excited to get his team on the field.

“We’ll take 40 guys and get all 40 on the field this weekend, which is great,” said Houser. “We’ll start off pretty simple without having a lot of time to implement things, and then we’ll see where we start and just try to move forward from that.”

The Red Wolves lost some key players in fullback Danie Swanepoel and hooker Nardus Wessels from last year’s DI-A runner-up team. And center Zac Mizell is out until at least April, if not the season, with a foot injury. But Arkansas State returns 16 of the 23 players from their roster for the DI-A final.

They also got back Tom Haussrer, who was injured last spring, and added Gavin Brown and Zinzan Elan-Puttick. Brown will help replenish the stable of speedsters on the wing, which took a hit with the departure of Josh Chomiczewiski and James Ritenour.

Elan-Puttick was arguably the Red Wolves' best 7s player in the fall, and could see time filling in for Mizell in the midfield. If/when Mizell returns, Elan-Puttick is a sure selection elsewhere, most likely as Swanepoel's replacement at fullback.

The competition at scrumhalf has improved drastically, too, with the emergence of a healthy Dylan Carrion. He, along with Elan-Puttick, could make a case for being the Red Wolves' best 7s player in the fall. Carrion's played wing for ASU in the past, but if he wants more time at No. 9, he'll have to get it from incumbent starter Yoshiyasu Abe.

"There was a reason why Abe wasn't on the 7s team and why Dylan was a starter. Dylan's a little bit more of a willing and able tackler and bit more of a dynamic attacker in terms of himself being a threat with the ball in hand," said Houser. "They'll provide different things. Abe's distribution skills are better at this point, but Dylan's working hard to improve those every day."

Texas A&M enters the contest having dropped a disappointing loss to rival LSU last week in College Station. The A-side game kicks off at 2pm CST Saturday.