

'Dogs again struggle on Saturday

There are only a handful of winnable games for a rebuilding football team in the MIAA.

I'm sure the players and coaches believe they can win every week, but come on. The San Diego Padres probably thought they could hang with the Cardinals, and we all know how that worked out.

One can pretty much put the games against Washburn University, Pittsburg State University, Northwest Missouri State University and Central Missouri State University in the loss column automatically. The 'Dogs actually have played the Bearcats tough in the last two years, and they deserve credit for that.

Notice, however, Emporia State is not part of that upper-echelon. The 'Dogs made them look like one of the conference elite on Saturday, though.

Senior line-backer Marcus Yokeley said the 'Dogs let one get away from them in front of the home fans.

"You want to win all your home games, no matter who it is," Yokeley said. "They're not as good as Washburn or Pitt State, though. It's a little more disappointing."

ESU, a 2-3 team coming in, is a middle-of-the-pack team in most statistical categories. The Hornets are not a very strong team fundamentally. They came into Saturday's action at -14 in the giveaway-takeaway. They don't have a dominant running back, and their defense is the weakest of all Truman's opponents so far this season.

Don't tell that to the Truman offense, though. The 'Dogs, who spent most of the game buried deep in their own end of the field, only converted three of 13 third-downs, and came away with points on just one of its four trips to the red zone.

Truman offensive coordinator Aaron Vlcko wasn't pleased with the red zone offense Saturday.

He said it is a difficult part of the field for an inexperienced quarterback to have success.

"We do have a freshman quarterback who's playing, and for him in particular, when you get in the red zone you need to take advantage of some man coverage situations," Vlcko said. "[Michael Long] hasn't had a lot of experience in that area."

Freshman quarterback Michael Long could use some help from his veteran teammates, though. The 'Dogs are a young team, but their youth is on the defensive side of the ball. Truman hasn't gotten much out of its returners on offense, and with no veteran presence calling the signals, this is the worst time for those guys to disappear.

The 'Dogs are suffering through their worst season offensively in 10 years. They are only converting 27 percent of their third-down plays. Part of the reason for this is they are averaging just more than three-and-a-half yards per play. Not per rush, per play.

What does all this mean? It means the 'Dogs are scoring 13.3 points a game, which won't get it done against Emporia State, let alone Washburn.

The offense made some progress in terms of yardage Saturday, but it didn't improve in the most important category, points.

Head coach Shannon Currier knows he can't just wave his magic wand and make it better.

"Right now we're not a very good football team, and it's going to take more than a week or even a season to turn one of the last-place teams in the conference into the best," Currier said.

If the 'Dogs continue to play like this, they will not take care of business against teams like Southwest Baptist University and Oklahoma Panhandle. Don't even think about what will happen against Washburn and Pitt State.

Currier said Saturday's score was misleading.

"It was closer than the score indicated," Currier said. "The difference between them and us isn't 41-12, I don't think."

I don't think so either, and that's what makes it the most disappointing loss of the year.

COLUMN | Bulldogs move to fourth in region

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worst loss in four years. Now, they're 10-3 and are back in business.

"The SIUE match was the worst I have seen us play," Cochran said. "We've been a lot more consistent recently."

The road to November will get easier this weekend as the team plays University of Missouri-Rolla and University of Missouri-St. Louis and University of Missouri-Rolla, two teams that reside in the pack. This team shouldn't lose as the offense is creating plenty of scoring opportunities and the defense only has allowed two goals in their last eight games. The big match will come the following weekend against rival Rockhurst University (Mo.), the current No. 2 team in the Great Lakes.

The Bulldogs put themselves back in the playoff hunt Sunday, but that game, played in Kansas City, will decide the 'Dogs' playoff chances.

And, if Gibson keeps making huge saves and Clayes continues to find netting, the purple and white might find themselves a playoff spot.

Golf places seventh at tourney

Billy Drazen
Staff Reporter

The fall season did not cause the men's golf team to fall out like it did last year.

The men finished seventh overall in the Heart of America Golf Classic and fifth out of the seven conference teams there.

"It's disappointing not beating [Missouri] Southern [State University]," junior Jesse Helms said. "We think of ourselves as the third or fourth team in conference."

The 'Dogs finished behind conference teams Washburn University, Missouri Southern State University, Missouri Western State College, and the winner of the Heart of America Golf Classic, Central Missouri State University.

Junior Kyle Kahleberg led the team shooting 74 on the first day and 71 on the second day for a 145 total, giving him a 14th

overall finish in the tournament. Helms finished second on the team and 21st overall with a first-day round of 76 and a second-day score of 71.

The other three Truman players in the tournament were junior Tyler Phillips and sophomores Adam Clatterback and Michael Spaulding finished with tournament totals of 150, 153 and 154, respectively.

The team finished with a two-day total of 594. Head coach Kevin White said even though the team did not reach its goal of finishing in the top four out of the conference teams, it did achieve its other goal by improving 10 shots from day one to day two.

"We want every player to shoot two shots better on day two," White said. "When we went from shooting a 302 on day one to a 292 on day two, we achieved that goal."

Finishing fifth out of the conference teams in this tournament puts the 'Dogs

in a tie with Missouri Southern at seven points each in the MIAA standings. After the second MIAA scoring event in the 2004 season, the Bulldogs had five points and were tied for fifth.

"Last fall was just hideous," Helms said. "So I think we were much improved this fall."

Clatterback attributed the improvement since last fall to harder work, more practice and the assistance of Jim Berry, who has been helping members of the team with lessons and drills to improve their game.

With the fall session over, the team looks to the off-season and ways that they can improve themselves. Clatterback said the team will get out on the golf course when the weather permits as well as find places to hit balls indoors.

White said the men are allowed to go out and play on their own in the winter, but the

NCAA regulates when coaches can be out there with the players.

White said the team will start a conditioning workout in the winter. The coaches have put together workouts for the players to help them build muscle.

White said hopefully this will help the team improve because it always seems like opposing players are bigger and stronger than his team.

There are two more MIAA scoring events in the spring before conference. The scoring in the conference tournament is doubled.

After this fall's success, White said he feels good about his team and its competitive spirit.

"We don't want one guy to play good and one guy to play bad," White said. "We want them all playing the same. No one has been our No. 1 all year long. We are just looking for a consistent level of competition."

SOCCER | Squad achieves double-digit victories for the 11th consecutive season, faces Missouri schools next

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wasn't made that Clayes' shot had indeed been a goal.

"It was a great weekend for us, and it's important that we keep winning," Clayes said. "This was a really big game, so taking care of a big team was a great win for us."

Not to be forgotten is junior goalkeeper Nate Gibson as he posted two more shutouts, raising his season total to six.

Gibson made two saves in the Mercyhurst contest and five saves against the Golden Knights, including a critical diving save in the 14th minute keeping the game scoreless.

"There's where if Gibson was a pro, he'd make his money," Cochran said. "He's one of the best in Div. II dealing with one-on-one shot stopping."

The Bulldogs now get the remainder of the week to rest, practice and prepare for another weekend of regional matches, this time facing a pair of Missouri

schools, the University of Missouri-Rolla and the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

The team travels to play Missouri-Rolla on Friday night while Missouri-St. Louis will visit Kirksville on Sunday afternoon for a noon start.

"We want to work in practice on possession," senior back Jared Atwood said. "I thought we did that really well this weekend. The desire to stay competitive in practice is really one of the keys to our success right now."

And that success is starting to show as the team now sports a 10-3 record, giving it double-digit victories for the 11th consecutive season dating back to 1994, when the squad finished 9-8-1. Since 1983, the men's soccer program has posted 10 or more wins in 19 of 23 seasons.

"Overall, we're starting to hit our stride," Cochran said. "I think we're ready to play anyone at this point."

"We need to be in the top three come November. We can certainly do it."

Duke Cochran
Soccer Head Coach



Chris Tharp/Index
Senior midfielder Geoff Brengle kicks the ball Sunday against Gannon University (Pa.). The Bulldogs won 1-0 to pull closer to an NCAA playoff spot. They currently rank fourth in the Great Lakes Region.

he might be a little too studious.

"This could be my last season here because I'm hoping to graduate in May," Gibson said. "I've got two or three more years of graduate school, so if I can get out, then I can get going on that."

Right now I'm just waiting to hear from some schools and finish my applications. It's just a matter of if I can get into the programs I'd like to get into."

Cochran said he would love to see the former All-American stick around for at least another semester in the fall.

"A player of Gibson's caliber you'd always love to have back," Cochran said. "We've talked about the possibilities. He's got an opportunity with a graduate school that a student cannot pass up, and I understand that, but I'd take him back in a heartbeat."

Whatever Gibson's decision at the end of the season, he is continuing to solidify his reputation.

Gibson is on the verge of breaking the school's all-time shutout record,

as he recorded the 27th and 28th shutouts of his career this past weekend. With his next one, he will surpass Stefan Wall's record set between 1988 to 1991.

He also sports a 0.61 career GAA, notably lower than the Bulldog record of 0.80 set by Dave Wiebenga during his years in the net from 1998-2001.

Not that he'd ever brag about it. After all, he's more concerned about winning a championship.

"It's just a matter of us staying on track and doing what we need to do," Gibson said. "I think we're better than any team in our region. It's just that a couple of bad calls and one bad game have hurt us so far."

So while he worries about the season at hand, his parents get to enjoy watching their son do what he loves to do.

"I've always been proud of everything he does because he does it with all of his heart," Nate's mother, Jo, said. "That's my baby out there."

It just goes to show that most still knows best.

GIBSON | Goalkeeper has six shutouts this season

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minutes from Oct. 3 to Oct. 31, along with his GAA, set NCAA Div. II records that season.

"It made me feel really good that all the hard work I'd put in was paying off," Gibson said. "A lot of this had to go to my defense, playing with guys like [senior] Jared Atwood, [senior] Mike Boyle and Bryan DeFoe."

"Of course my stats would be good when all I had to do was clean up what trickled through. It made me feel good that we as a defense could show those kinds of numbers. I'm proud of the guys in front of me, past and present, and I'm proud we can do this as a group effort."

He followed that season up in 2004 by becoming only the third Bulldog goalkeeper to play every minute of the season, finishing with a 12-4-3 record and nine shutouts along with a microscopic 0.70 GAA.

So far in 2005, Gibson has worked more than 1,100 minutes between the pipes, compiling a 0.70 GAA, a 10-3 overall record, and six shutouts.

In the course of three seasons, he's made almost 170 saves.

Head coach Duke Cochran said Gibson is good at what he does.

"Nate always shows up to play," Cochran said. "He's intense, wants to work hard, and wants people around him to work hard. He's one of those kids that could be in the parking lot,

field, or wherever that just wants to play, and he brings that mentality all the time."

So why would his hometown school and Bulldog regional rival, Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville, ever let him get away?

"[Gibson] was one of our prime recruits that year and certainly a top target of ours," SIUE coach Ed Huneke said. "We went through the whole process, but I think the biggest factor was his academic interest, which we didn't

have. His decision just showed that he's obviously a great fit for Truman as a student-athlete because of his priorities."

However, the recognition towards Gibson by Huneke and his staff certainly didn't go unnoticed.

"[Huneke] really wanted me pretty badly," Gibson said. "The fact that both my parents work at SIU would allow him to see them quite often and nudge them to talk to me."

Gibson started receiving goalkeeping lessons eight years ago, but has been involved in the game since he was 12 years old.

In addition to his responsibilities as a high school goalkeeper, Gibson played for Metro FC, a club team composed of players from around the Metro East and St. Louis during his sophomore through senior years of high school.

Gibson is pursuing his degree in physical therapy through the exercise science major. For Bulldog soccer fans however,

"Nate always shows up to play, He's intense, wants to work hard, and wants people around him to work hard."

Duke Cochran
Head Soccer coach

FOOTBALL | Offensive line allows no sacks on Saturday against Emporia State; 'Dogs play Washburn on Saturday

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Senior linebacker Marcus Yokeley said the defense shoulders some of the responsibility for lack of field position.

"Sometimes we get put in difficult positions, but we do it to the offense, too," Yokeley said. "On the first drive of the game, we stopped [Emporia State], but we let them drive all the way to our 40."

They punted from there, so the offense got it at the eight. It's a two-way street."

Junior tight end Rich Mayson said the holes were too deep to climb out of Saturday.

"Field position can be a big advantage, and it can be a big disadvantage," Mayson said. "We definitely came out on the losing end of all that."

The inability of the offense to consistently move the football eventually took its toll on the defense. The 'Dogs pressured ESU quarterback Justin Whitworth relentlessly in the first quarter.

They sacked him three times, with junior defensive end Darryl Reddick collecting two of them. As Emporia State continued to begin drives in and near Truman territory, however, the 'Dogs seemed to tire.

Football Offensive Woes

The offense, in terms of points per game and third-down conversion rate, is the worst in the last 10 years.

Year	Statistic	Number	Second Worst
2005	Points per game	13.3	2003- 14.6
2005	Yards per play	3.6	2003- 4.3
2005	3rd-down conversion rate	27 percent	2000- 34 percent

Designed by Mark Hylton/Index

The Truman offense did show some improvement from a yardage standpoint. The 'Dogs accumulated 364 yards of total offense.

They had their most effective ground attack of the season, as senior running back Jerard Levenson pounded

out 126 yards and a touchdown. It was the first 100-yard rushing performance by Levenson during the Currier Era.

The offensive line did its job Saturday, also. Not only did it open up running lanes for Levenson, but it kept freshman quarterback Michael Long's

uniform relatively clean, not allowing a single sack.

Long and his teammates took better care of the ball for the first 55 minutes of the game at least.

The 'Dogs didn't commit a turnover until the final five minutes, during which Long threw three interceptions.

Mayson said the yards were much easier to come by inside the 20s.

"As you get closer to the red zone, it becomes harder to get plays down the field," Mayson said.

The next two opponents for Truman have plenty of red zone threats. The 'Dogs next opponent, Washburn University, is the only undefeated team left in conference play.

The following Saturday, they hosts Pittsburg State University on Homecoming. The Gorillas are right behind Washburn in the conference standings.

Currier said he looks at Saturday's game as a chance to shock the world.

"We have a great opportunity on our hands to go play one of the best teams in the country again," Currier said. "There's no pressure on us. No one's going to pick us to win, so this is our chance to go to Washburn's Homecoming and pull off an upset that will be remembered for a long time."