

SOCCER | Squad returns goal-scoring trio of Martin Clayes, Lars Pottgiesser and Sean Birrell; team looks to match 2003's 20-1 record



Freshman Matt Taylor saves the ball in a scrimmage against William Penn University (Kan.) Thursday. After missing the playoffs in 2004, the Bulldogs look to make a return to the post season for the fifth time in nine years.

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and University of Wisconsin-Parkside, two teams who would eventually make the regional playoffs ahead of Truman.

In mid-October, the 'Dogs gained two huge victories on their home turf, defeating the University of Findlay (Ohio) and Northern Kentucky University. Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville loomed in the distance in a game, which would make or break the Truman season.

The team lost 2-1 though, essentially ending any chance to make the postseason.

This year's schedule will prove challenging, but the anticipated rematches against Wisconsin-Parkside and Lewis will be at home. Pennsylvania powerhouses Mercyhurst University and Gannon University also will make an appearance in Kirksville.

Truman has a difficult road schedule as well, having to travel to play SIU-Edwardsville again, along with return trips to Findlay and Northern Kentucky.

The team also travels south towards the end of the season to face the University of Central Arkansas and Christian Brothers University (Tenn.).

Possibly the two games creating the biggest storylines, however, are the last two home games of the season. Bilbao's Drury University crew return in late October, while Div. I Western Illinois

University visits Kirksville on Truman's Senior Day, a game that will be very emotional for many Bulldog players.

"Supporting the student-athletes is very important, and this is a team that will be fighting not just in the region, but nationally, for recognition and some great results," head coach Duke Cochran said.

Hold on everybody, this should be an amazing ride.

"This is a team that will be fighting for... some great results."

Duke Cochran
New Head Soccer Coach

COACH | Skoch arrives after assisting at Central Oklahoma in 2003 and Div. I Mississippi State in 2004; will lead 2004 NCAA runners-up

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coach the Div. II's national runners-up.

After high school, Skoch played on several club teams, including those at Penn St. University, University of Memphis and Oklahoma St. University.

He has also coached various club teams and a Stillwater (Okla.) high school.

In 2003, he was an assistant coach at Central Oklahoma, as they went 23-7 in the Lone Star Conference. Then, in 2004, he was going to take over a fledgling program at a nearby high school, but received an e-mail from the current Mississippi St. assistant coach.

"I would see him periodically at tournaments during recruiting season," Skoch said. "He and I were both coaching club teams, and we would always talk about strategy and volleyball whenever we saw each other. He took a position at Rice University and recommended me for the job at MSU."

Skoch soon discovered the battleground that is Southeastern Conference (SEC) volleyball.

"The SEC is the No. 2 athletic conference in the country," he said. "The best Div. I players in the country play here. There are girls that can jump to 10 feet, 10 feet three inches, 10 feet four inches down there."

The Bulldogs were often SEC bottom-feeders, finishing 3-23 in 2003. The next season proved to be different. With Skoch calling the serves, the Bulldogs ranked first in the SEC with 1.94 service aces per game, en route to winning five conference matches and 14 overall.

The five SEC victories tied the Mississippi State school record, while the 11-win improvement also matched the best one season improvement in school history.

"All three coaches worked as a team," MSU head coach Tina Seals said. "Jason [did a great job] on calling serves and also

helped with the middles and the defense. He's very intelligent and will make a great coach."

Currently, his role is a little different than it was in Starkville, Miss.

He's leading a team that arguably has the best talent in the country, has finished second two of the last three years and probably won't consider this season successful unless they win the national title.

Skoch is primarily working on eliminating little mistakes that cropped up in several matches last season, including five-setters against conference rival Central Missouri

State University and Pittsburg State University and the national championship game against Barry University.

"We're going to get more specialized," Skoch said. "You can't argue with 37-1, but there's no reason why we shouldn't be better. We have to eliminate the silly stuff [from last year]."

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Jason Skoch
New Head Volleyball Coach

While Wang emphasized the mental aspect of volleyball,

Skoch focuses on different parts of the game.

"He's a lot more intense," Remley said. "He demands a lot more physically than Qi did in practice. It's something that I think we needed. He's also helped to improve our defense over last season, and he's worked with the middles with transitioning and becoming more a part of the offense."

His attitude is also completely different than Qi's. Wang wasn't a coach who gave out multiple compliments.

"[Skoch] has been very, very positive," Remley said. "He'll get on us when we're lazy, but if we are doing something wrong, he doesn't yell. Instead, he tries to change things to make them better."

Skoch also surprised the team with a recent trip to Lake St. Louis on Aug. 14, a tactic Wang never used during his four-year tenure as head coach.

After a week of three-a-day practices, Skoch felt the players

needed a day off to relax. The players enjoyed the break.

"It was really nice to get away from Kirksville, and more importantly, the gym for a day," Remley said. "The weather could have been better, but it was still a lot of fun."

Now, the 'Dogs are back in the gym and gearing for their first test, the preseason tournament that features multiple ranked teams, including No. 4 University of Minnesota-Duluth and Wang's Northern Michigan.

The team, though, shouldn't be judged in the early matches. Instead, Skoch's system and his players will face their test in November.

"Our focus is the final result," Wackerman said. "We want to improve every game and win conference, the conference championship and ultimately win the national championship."

The decision in April was simple. The goals are simple.

And now, simply put, the Jason Skoch era begins.



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