

**FOCUS | 'Dogs' fall 3-1 to UN-Kearney**

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 Later that frame, the entire squad showed its heart, battling back from three match points at 29-24 before falling 30-27.

Overall, they saved four match points and seven set points against a crowd so loud that UNK senior outside hitter Kelli Bunker said, "You could literally feel the building shaking."

But that's this season's team. The 'Dogs always found a way to fight back. They didn't have a spring season after the loss of former coach Qi Wang.

They also had a first-year head coach – the only team in the Elite Eight with a new helmsman.

Many people thought the 'Dogs couldn't even reach the Elite Eight after three mid-season conference losses, but they found an extra gear, going 12-2 in their last 14 matches, including multiple wins over nationally ranked opponents, including defeating top-10 rival Washburn University on two occasions.

Last Thursday, no one thought they could win game three. But the purple and white found a way.

Sure, they probably could have beaten Kearney won the national title if they had better sets, fewer errors and a little more offensive power.

But this team never would have played last Thursday – and kept on coming back – if it weren't for the determination it showed throughout the season.

**SEASON | 'Dogs win 30-plus games for the fifth time in the past six years, advance to the nationals for third time since '02**

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"Our blocking average went up each match," Skoch said. "We out blocked our last five or six opponents. One of those was [the University of Nebraska-Kearney – one of the best blocking teams in the country.]"

Blocking was not enough, however, to overcome UNK in the NCAA quarterfinals.

Truman lost the match 3-1 and ended its season with a 32-6 record.

Although third time wasn't a charm for the Bulldogs, the season was not a loss.

"Without a doubt, I would say this season was a success just by what we were able to do by making it to the national tournament," senior middle hitter Tiffany Graham said. "There are a lot of teams that didn't make it that far."

A lot of teams didn't have as many postseason award winners as well.

The American Volleyball Coaches Association named Kelsey Wackerman and junior outside hitter Sarah Shearman First Team All-Americans. Both players also were First Team All-MIAA and All-South Central Region selections.

The 2005 season was the first time Wackerman reaped any kind of accolade.

"I think that last year, my playing time went back and forth," Wackerman said. "I'd get a chance, and then I wouldn't get a chance. I think that affected my confidence a lot."

Wackerman said her confidence was not negatively affected too much this year. She set a

school record and led the NCAA with 15 triple-doubles.

"This year, being able to know that I was going to be given a chance continuously – I think that really helped my confidence," she said.

Shearman, on the other hand, is a postseason award regular. Her First Team All-American selection accompanies a Second Team All-American selection last year and a 2003 Freshman of the Year award.

This season, Shearman led the team with 3.86 kills and 3.89 digs a game.

"She's never satisfied for going halfway," Wackerman said. "She always puts forward her full effort, and that's just amazing."

Two of the four seniors, middle hitters Micaela Walter and Megan Remley, received decoration as well.

Walter was named to the All-South Central Region and Second Team All-MIAA while Remley was an honorable mention All-MIAA choice.

With Graham leaving the team as well, the lone remaining middle hitter will be freshman Dana Hanselmann.

"Dana is amazing," Graham said. "I firmly believe that if she went to any other school in our conference, she would've seen a lot of playing time."

But with the departure of the seniors comes an influx of freshman talent. Skoch said his 2005 recruiting class will be a great one.

"The freshmen we have coming in, they almost seem to be at the level our seniors are leaving at," he said.

Thus far, Skoch has signed



Adam Kabins/Index

The Truman volleyball team breaks from the huddle after a timeout. Head coach Jason Skoch said he has high hopes for next season with a strong recruiting class and key players returning.

an All-State outside hitter from Texas who was MVP in her district, two setters – one from Kansas City who was All-State, the other from Minnesota who won the state championship her junior year and was All-State her senior year – and a middle hitter from Nebraska who made the Nebraska Juniors club team, the unofficial volleyball club for the Div. I University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

However, Skoch said the

squad still has to get better in certain areas.

"We still need to improve on leadership," he said.

Wackerman agreed with Skoch's sentiments. She said she plans on taking a leadership role next year.

"I think that being a senior and Sarah [Shearman] being a senior, I think that maybe we could step into that leadership role, along with all the other seniors," Wackerman said. "It's

expected of us."

With the new recruiting class, the stellar freshmen trio of outside hitters Melissa Keck and Eli Medina and libero Whitney Boehler and two returning First Team All-Americans, Skoch said next year's squad should be a lot better than this year.

"I think we have as good a shot of anybody at winning nationals next year," he said. "I'm looking forward to next year."

**VOLLEYBALL | Bulldogs finish at 32-6 after falling to Kearney in front of Div. II-record crowd**

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 took an early 5-3 lead.

"We had a favorable matchup with Erin and [Truman freshman outside hitter Eli Medina] on the outside," UNK head coach Rick Squires said. "We went to the slide a lot to take advantage of [Erin's better] vertical jump."

They still kept the match close never falling behind by more than five. At 29-25, backed by a Shearman kill, a Medina kill and a UNK error, the 'Dogs saved three game points and pulled within one, but Gerdes slammed a kill down the middle of the floor to capture the set.

The Bulldogs actually outthit the Lopers in the second frame, hitting .232 to the UNK's .179. Shearman and freshman libero Whitney Boehler helped the defensive front, as each had 18 digs on the backline through the first two games.

Overall, Boehler finished with 32 digs and Shearman with 30, the first time since 1995 Bulldog players had eclipsed the 30-dig plateau for a match. Boehler's digs rank fourth in the 'Dogs' record book for a single match.

"I think we played well on defense," Skoch said. "They're not a big team, so we have to play smart. Our defense was solid, but some



Adam Kabins/Index

Freshman libero Whitney Boehler executes a dig versus the University of Nebraska-Kearney. Boehler led the team in digs for the match against the No. 1 team in the country with 32.

of our players on the backline got a little fried and overwhelmed after the first game. We didn't play our best overall."

Never was this more evident than in the third set as the Bulldogs started containing Gudmundson, but attack errors gave the Lopers free points.

The purple and white jumped out to a 17-15 lead before three Bulldog errors and four kills

brought the Lopers to a 24-18 lead and the cusp of winning the match.

After a timeout and a pep talk by Remley, the purple and white fought back and saved a match point at 30-29 with a touch kill from Wackerman.

After kills from senior middle hitter Tiffany Graham and Shearman, the 'Dogs won the third set 32-30.

"It was incredible that we stood up like that," Wackerman said.

In the fourth set, the 'Dogs jumped out to a 4-0 lead, but UNK rallied to capture a 12-11 lead.

"We would start playing great, and then we would freak out and create an unforced error," Skoch said. "We made some poor choices, and a poor choice at this level is going to be a problem."

The rest of the set had eight ties and six lead changes before the Lopers, with Gudmundson serving, reeled off five straight points for a 29-24 lead. The 'Dogs saved three match points before Brosz hit a kill on the right side for the victory.

Offensively, Wackerman and Shearman each had 12 kills although Wackerman – a First Team All-American – hit only .136.

Freshman outside hitter Melissa Keck contributed 13 kills and a .294 average, one of three freshmen – along with Medina (17 digs) and Boehler – who greatly contributed.

"I'm already thinking about next season," Skoch said. "We lost some bangers and leadership from last season, but the players pushed things and led themselves."

## Volleyball By The Numbers

**32** Number of wins for the Bulldogs this year with first-year head coach Jason Skoch. This was the fifth time in the last six seasons the Bulldogs have reached 30 wins. Freshman libero Whitney Boehler also had 32 digs in the Elite Eight loss to Nebraska-Kearney, the fourth highest total in Bulldog history.

**2** The Bulldogs had two First Team All-Americans for the first time in school history as junior outside hitter Sarah Shearman and junior outside hitter/setter Kelsey Wackerman earned such honors. Wackerman, who led the NCAA Div. II with 15 triple-doubles, also earned the MIAA MVP Award.

**3** Number of freshmen who started or contributed in the playoffs. Freshman outside hitters Eli Medina and Melissa Keck and libero Whitney Boehler form a nucleus for years to come.

**12-1** After losing three straight conference midseason matches, the Bulldogs turned the season around and only lost one match (to the University of North Alabama) before UNK defeated them in the Elite Eight.

Designed by Bethany Aurand/Index

**BASKETBALL | Bulldogs twice defeat Lincoln University (Mo.) in a home-and-home series, will face Venard College (Iowa) at home tonight.**

| MIAA Conference Standings   |            |
|-----------------------------|------------|
| 1. Southwest Baptist        | 9-0        |
| 2. Central Missouri State   | 7-1        |
| <b>3. Truman</b>            | <b>5-1</b> |
| 4. Emporia State            | 7-2        |
| 5. Missouri Western State   | 7-2        |
| 6. Northwest Missouri State | 6-2        |
| 7. Washburn                 | 5-2        |
| 8. Missouri Southern State  | 6-3        |
| 9. Pittsburg State          | 4-5        |

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 One stat Bulldog head coach Jack Schrader didn't like to see in the box score was the rebounding totals. Lincoln outrebounded the 'Dogs 40-32, including a 14-5 advantage on the offensive glass.

"I think Lincoln is a very physically talented team, similar to some of the more physical teams in our conference," Schrader said. "They pretty much had their way with us the whole game. We played soft, and they capitalized on it."

The 'Dogs are now 5-1 on the season, including a perfect 4-0 mark at home. The squad is also in the top-tier of many MIAA statistical categories, something

that can give fans an idea how the team might match up against other MIAA teams come the conference season.

"We take a lot of pride in our defense, and we know that's what is going to take us through the conference season," sophomore guard Nick Certa said. "The offense looks pretty good right now, but our main focus so far and for the rest of the season will be our defense."

A pair of games are on the slate in the upcoming week, as the 'Dogs host Venard College (Iowa) tonight in Pershing Arena before opening up the conference season against Southwest Baptist University on Saturday afternoon in Bolivar, Mo.

Because of the University of Missouri-Rolla's departure from the conference, eight of the nine remaining MIAA teams will play one conference game this week before getting into the rest of the conference schedule in late December.

"They beat us in two very close games last year and are capable of beating you different ways with two big guys inside," Schrader said. "They crash the boards really well, have played as challenging of a pre-conference schedule as anybody and are still undefeated. We look at it as a good opportunity to institute a game plan, go down there, execute it and surprise them a little bit."

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