

Rugby begins spring season

Josh Sisson
Staff Reporter

Three matches into the spring season, the Bullets rugby club still is looking for its first win. Winning, however, might not be the most important thing for the Bullets right now. Twelve new members joined the club this semester, and none of them have played before.

Senior backs coach/wing Krista Kastler said Saturday's 17-10 loss against Des Moines is an example of how outscoring opponents may take a backseat to developing young talent.

"At the beginning of the game, we had our more experienced players in so the

new girls could watch and get a feel for the game," Kastler said. "Later, we mixed the unexperienced with the experienced, and the game didn't flow as well, but that's not what we were really out to do. I feel like we accomplished our goal for the weekend."

Senior player and coach Natalie Gerhart said she is familiar with the rebuilding process.

"It's hard the way our team works, having to teach new people every semester," Gerhart said. "But, it's really the only way we can work."

The Bullets kicked off their spring schedule Feb. 25 with a doubleheader against Washington University in St. Louis and the University of Missouri-Columbia.

They stuck with Wash U. until the end, but lost 12-10. The matchup with Mizzou was a different story. Mizzou led the first half and never trailed, shutting out the Bullets 34-0.

Kastler said Mizzou is a tough assignment, especially for such a young team.

"Mizzou's such a good team even when you play to win with your most experienced players," Kastler said.

The Bulls rugby club, however, is in a completely different mode. To qualify for westerns, its regional tournament, they must not only win, but win by a lot of points.

The Bulls have to finish in the top two of their pool if they are to advance. As of now, they are 10 points out, with the University of Nebraska and University of Oklahoma tied

for first. The standings are based on a point system that awards four points for every win, plus an additional point for every match in which a team scores four tries or more. With two matches left, the Bulls must win both, while scoring at least four tries.

If they do so, it would create a three-way tie between Nebraska, Oklahoma and Truman. The tie break comes down to point differential, or margin of victory. This means Truman needs to score as much as possible in its next two matches with University of Kansas and Oklahoma State University. Bulls rugby coach Bill Sexton expects his team to overtake Nebraska, but Oklahoma might be tougher to catch.

"We should be able to get that second

seed and get to the [playoffs]," Sexton said. "But, we'd need a point differential of 93 or 94 to pass Oklahoma and take first."

Oklahoma just handed the Bulls their first loss of the semester Saturday, 32-14.

The Bulls got their spring off to a fast start, winning the St. Louis University tournament Feb. 24-25. The Bulls defeated Wash. U., Marquette University, Benedictine College, and SLU on route to the title.

Team captain and flyhalf senior Sean Foley said the tournament was a good experience.

"It was good to get those games under our belt," Foley said. "The standard of competition wasn't nearly as high as a team like Oklahoma, though."

Athlete of the Week

Nick Certa

Sport: Basketball

Year: Sophomore

Hometown: Godfrey, Ill.

Despite not starting, Certa led the Bulldogs in scoring in the team's first round loss to Emporia State University on Friday. He put in 18 points on 5-7 shooting, including 4-4 from three point range. He was one of six 'Dogs to score in double digits. Certa is averaging 7.8 points per game on the season. In his second season, Certa has improved his minutes, points and rebounding totals from his first year.

Certa doesn't slump in sophomore year

Conor Nicholl
Sports Editor

For sophomore forward Nick Certa, the season has consisted of momentum-turning plays.

There was The Dunk against Emporia State University on Feb. 4, a ferocious slam that earned a huge roar and standing ovation from the fans at Pershing Arena.

He delivered The Drive versus Pittsburg State University on Feb. 11. With the Gorillas ahead 69-67 with 12 seconds left, Certa took the ball at the top of the arc, delivered two strong right-handed dribbles and flew in for a game-tying layup that propelled the Bulldogs to an overtime win.

This last Saturday against Emporia in the first round of the MIAA tournament, the athletic, multi-faceted Certa delivered in another way - three-point shooting. He was perfect from beyond the arc, sinking four of four three-pointers and collecting a team-high 18 points in only 19 minutes.

Head coach Jack Schrader said Certa often causes mismatches for opposing teams.

"He can shoot it and can explode to the basket," he said. "He's athletic and can play inside and outside and is similar to our problem covering [Emporia's Wes Book]. He can create matchup problems when he plays inside."

Certa is listed as a forward, but his 6-foot-6-inch, 195-pound frame poses difficulty for small forwards. He's also faster and can jump higher than most post players, allowing him to fly to the lane to score from the inside and grab rebounds.

"I was always a wing until I came here," Certa said. "I started learning the post when I came here, and the other play-

ers helped me out a lot. I've become more versatile, but I still have some things to work on."

Like alumnus Matt Beran and junior forward Andy Calmes, Certa greatly improved in his second season. He's put on nearly 15 pounds since his freshman year and has developed his shot and inside game.

"Matt and Andy had more of a consistent, constant pattern," Schrader said. "Nick has not had the consistent playing time that they had - not because he doesn't deserve it, but because he's in a tough situation playing two positions behind Derek [Lindsey] and Andy. Nick's role now is doing whatever he can."

Overall, Certa has achieved plenty, developing into arguably the conference's top sixth man, coming off the bench in every game this season. He's one of only three underclassmen and the only non-starter on the MIAA rebounding list, pulling down 4.8 a night.

Through practice, confidence and many shooting sessions, Certa has skyrocketed his scoring output from 2.2 points in 2004-05 to 7.8 points/game this year. His field goal percentage has escalated from 25.4 last season to 48.9 this year.

Saturday also helped him get back to his season averages. In his five games before the conference tournament, Certa logged little playing time and scored only 13 points. But with junior forward Grant Agbo sick, Certa knew he would see plenty of minutes.

"He's still awfully young, and that lends itself to some inconsistency," Schrader said, referring to Certa's five turnovers Saturday. "He knew he was going to play a lot, and he played very hard and very determined. He's capable of a performance like that on any night."



Photos by Chris Tharp, Design by Chris Waller/Index



Line Drive
Photo by Chris Tharp

Junior outfielder Gina Walsh makes contact during practice earlier this season. After the first day of the Missouri Western Tournament the 'Dogs won two out of three games on day two. Both of the victories came on shutouts. After seven games the 'Dogs are 3-4 on the season.

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