

SENIORS | 'Dogs win 1-0 on Sunday

Continued from Page 17 including a 1-0 win against Div. I Western Illinois University Sunday on Senior Day.

"Every game it was lose and go home," head coach Duke Cochran said. "After a while, everything just started to click. We're playing our best soccer of the season right now."

Fourteen players were honored Sunday as the most decorated class in Bulldog history, including the University's greatest passer (Martin Claves), all-time shutout leader (Nate Gibson), former All-Americans (Gibson and Sean Birrell) and plenty of two and three-year all-region starters.

In the past four years, the 'Dogs have made two trips to the playoffs, finished 20-1 and reached the quarterfinals in 2003 and enjoyed an overall record of 61-12-4 entering tonight.

This year, though, could be their finest hour.

For many, including captains Atwood and Birrell, the greatest moment of their four years came in the 2003 regional final against archrival Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville. The 'Dogs, 19-0 entering the match, defeated SIUE 5-2 behind three goals from current senior forward Lars Pottgeisser.

Fall 2005 could pose a better finish. Five matches separate the 'Dogs from a national title - an attainable goal that these year's class set four falls ago.

Tonight at 7, the 'Dogs will play rival Rockhurst University at SIUE's pitch. The winner will face off against SIUE Saturday night to determine a NCAA Div. I quarter-final berth.

On Monday, Atwood couldn't contain his excitement at the thought of beating both Rockhurst and SIUE to advance to the quarterfinals.

"It would be unexplainable," Atwood said with a huge smile. "This is what you spend the whole year working toward. All those summer hours, all those practices, this is what you live for."

All three teams are nationally ranked - SIUE checks in at No. 2 in the country - and all three are very similar athletically and statistically. Each squad has three to four players who are either deadly off dead balls or can score at will.

Truman and Rockhurst, though, are nearly the same team. After 20 regular season games, they share identical goal differentials (+41).

The Hawks have the region's leading goal and point scorer in Haggai Lebo. The 'Dogs have Mr. Assist in Claves.

Fouls and yellow cards should also play an impact in tonight's match. Officials distributed 48 fouls and five yellow cards.

Fouls create dead balls, which is where Claves is most dangerous. Also, if sophomore back Dan Gajewski earns another yellow card, he will be ineligible for Saturday night. Emotions will run high.

"Rockhurst is a big, physical team at the point of dirty," Atwood said. "It was a disgrace last match. They must have fouled Sean at least 20 times."

Despite the perpetual violence, the 'Dogs won the match 1-0 behind a late goal from Birrell.

"That was the most complete 90 minutes of soccer we played the entire year," Cochran said. "Everyone did their jobs and created opportunities. The work rate was awesome. There wasn't any lull in the contest."

Atwood agreed with Cochran's assessment.

"We took control from the start and set the tempo," he said. "We intimidated them from the start."

The same thing has to happen tonight. In their three biggest wins of the year - against Lewis University, Gannon and Rockhurst - the purple and white has won 1-0.

In all three matches, Claves and Co. outshot their opponents by at least a 2:1 edge during the opening 45 minutes.

The fouls and cards probably are still going to be called, but if the 'Dogs play better in the first 45 minutes, they should win.

They also need to score first. On the purple and white's season, the team that has scored first has won 19 of 20 games.

"It's probably even more paramount [to score first] because it's the playoffs," Birrell said. "When a team scores first, the other squad gets down mentally and psychologically."

And an early goal and a 1-0 lead in both matches could propel the 'Dogs into the quarterfinals. And keep the winning streak and the memories alive for the greatest class in the history of Bulldog soccer.



Senior forward Marty Claves dribbles the ball during the 'Dogs' 3-0 win over regional foe Drury University (Mo.) on Oct. 26.

PLAYOFFS | 'Dogs enter postseason as No. 2 seed in Great Lakes

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(Mo.), which sports a 15-4-1 record and is fresh off a Great Lakes Valley Conference tournament title, Thursday evening in a 7 p.m. start.

The winner of the 'Dogs/Rockhurst match will take on the host Cougars at 7 p.m. Saturday evening with the winner advancing to the Elite Eight the follow-

ing weekend.

The winner of the Great Lakes region will face off against the winner of the Appalachian region, whose representatives in the national tournament are Carson-Newman College (Tenn.), Catawba College (N.C.) and Tusculum College (Tenn.).

The 'Dogs defeated Rockhurst 1-0 Oct. 23 but lost 4-0 to SIUE

on Sept. 9, while SIUE defeated Rockhurst 3-1 Oct. 2 in Kansas City (Mo.). Both games were road affairs for the 'Dogs.

"It's going to be a hard and intense week of practice," McCarthy said. "We just want to get prepared, take care of our bodies and make sure we're ready to go for the intense weekend that's ahead of us."



Senior captain Lauren Cepicky dribbles the ball against Central Missouri State University.

ROADTRIP | 'Dogs begin playoffs tonight in the MIAA Tournament semifinals against rival Central Missouri State University

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practice at Spragins Hall, implying UAH needs to be seventh in the region to make the tournament. "They beat us, they go to regionals. This is huge. They're going to come and play their lights out."

This seems to inspire the women, as they dive for balls and seem much more focused than they did Thursday morning.

Freshman outside hitter Melissa Keck later said the team's focus will determine how the team will perform.

"If we focus, we'll get the job done," she said.

Skoch said he was pleased with the morning practice.

"The main thing was just getting them used to the gym," he said. "A lot of the silly stuff they did, I just thought I'd get it out of their system now."

At 5 p.m., the team has a final pregame practice. Skoch, for the most part, sits on the bench and observes his players' performance.

At 7 p.m., the match is underway. The 'Dogs easily take the first game, 30-24. The second game starts out the same way, with beginning with a 6-2 Truman run.

Then, a screech erupts over all other noise in the gym.

Senior middle hitter Micaela Walter, Truman's leader in kills at the time, came down funny on her right ankle. Skoch lunges off the bench immediately to make sure one of his best hitters was OK.

Walter kept saying she was, but anyone could tell she wasn't. She couldn't put any pressure on it, and Skoch tells freshman middle hitter Dana Hanselmann to get warmed up.

With Walter out, the Chargers change lead with the 'Dogs seven times. Truman still was able to hold on and win the game 30-22. The third game went to the 'Dogs

30-27, even though UAH inked six of the first seven points.

"We didn't sacrifice and leave it all on the court," Skoch said following the match. "That's something we got to work on."

The big question of the evening is if Walter would be able to play against UNA.

"I definitely know she will play on it if at all possible," sophomore libero Amanda Holliday said on the bus ride back to the hotel. "Even if she's in a whole lot of pain, she'll tough it out."

Another jab of bad news hits the 'Dogs in the face. Kelsey Wackerman is sick. It appears as if someone is trying to make tomorrow's game against the University of North Alabama as tough as possible for the 'Dogs.

Day 3: Focus - or lack thereof

Skoch needs to make a difficult decision concerning Walter and the UNA match.

"We need that win," Skoch said before the UNA match. "But in the same time, if she can't produce and hurts her for the playoffs, it's not worth [playing her]."

The team gathers for the hour and a half trip to Florence, Ala., for the 1 p.m. match against UNA, arguably the biggest match of the weekend.

Skoch climbs aboard the bus and tells the team it is going to watch a tape of UNA playing Northwest Missouri State University.

It watches the first two games of the Lions' three-game sweep, with Skoch occasionally chiming in with things he wants the team to take note of.

Before the UAH game yesterday, the squad didn't perform this ritual. It is obvious the UNA match is a big deal.

"I'm excited," sophomore libero Marti Joyer said prior to the

Volleyball

trek to Alabama

Date	Opponent	Key Players	Result
Nov. 4	Alabama-Huntsville	Sarah Shearman 15 kills, 16 digs Tiffany Graham 12 kills, .733 attack pct.	3-0
Nov. 5	North Alabama (6)	Kelsey Wackerman 6 kills, 28 assists, 16 digs	1-3
Nov. 5	Lincoln Memorial	Wackerman 10 kills, 20 assists, 12 digs, .667 attack pct.	3-0

match. "It will be a test to our mental power and our skill."

After the team completes its warmups in the voluminous Flowers Hall, Walter won't be playing. She stays on the sideline with the rest of the team.

The good news, however, is Wackerman will be playing.

The 'Dogs breeze by the Lions in the first game, 30-

26. Skoch has a game plan for shutting down UNA's best hitter, Vanessa Ferretti, and it appears to be working.

So why do they lose the next three games to lose the match 3-1?

"They outworked us," Skoch said after the match. "They went for more balls than us."

Skoch also said Truman's lack of consistency and unforced errors put the game in the Lions' den.

Junior outside hitter Sarah Shearman agreed with Skoch's

sentiments.

"We lost some consistency overall," she later said. "I think that was a big part of it. And there were more unforced errors."

The team drives straight back to Huntsville to face Lincoln Memorial University (Tenn.) at 7 p.m., which everyone thinks will be the easiest match on the trip.

Although the squad wins in straight games, all three are closer than they needed to be.

"I think we could've played a lot better," Shearman said. "We really didn't focus like we needed to."

Focus. This is a word that has been thrown around a lot this weekend. Skoch said this small aspect has been especially problematic for Truman volleyball.

"We just lose focus," he said on the bus ride back to the hotel. "We get happy, and the match

A Great Lakes Region Coach Sizes Up the Playoffs

"SIUE started well, but they might have peaked too early. They've really taken a few knocks here late in the season, and a few teams have come really close to beating them...."

"I don't see anybody really stopping Truman because they're a complete team overall."

"Rockhurst is comparable with Truman even though Truman beat them earlier this season. Electric goal-scorers for the Hawks, but they aren't extremely dominant players."

"I just can't guarantee that SIUE would be the team coming out of the region."

"A key for Truman is that they can't go down early in the game. If they don't allow a team to get them down early, they'll be all right."

"My pick to come out of the region is Truman."

"I see Rockhurst giving them a game, but I don't think it will be enough, and with SIUE, I don't see them making it out of the region since they've fallen to the side somewhat here late in the season."

Top 4 Things to Watch For In the Playoffs

- Who will score first?** The team that has scored first has won 19 of the 20 Bulldogs' games this season.
- How many touches will Sean Birrell see?** Birrell saw little action in the 'Dogs' 4-0 loss to SIUE earlier this year, but scored the game-winning goal against Rockhurst.
- Fouls and yellow cards.** Games against Rockhurst are usually foul and card-heavy. Bulldog sophomore back Dan Gajewski is one yellow card away from missing the next playoff game, and Marty Claves does his best work on dead balls after fouls.
- Winning the middle third of the field.** Whoever wins the middle third will control possession and have the offensive edge.

Conor Nicholl and Tyler Madsen

MIAA | 'Dogs win conference on final day

Continued from Page 17 minute of the first half, making the score 4-0. She scored off of a corner kick from freshman Brigitte Pohren.

Newsham said she wanted to play well Saturday because her parents came to watch.

"My mom and dad haven't really come out to many games, and this is the only goal my parents have gotten to see at Truman," Newsham said. "I think when your family comes out, you just want to play well for them and make them proud."

The 'Dogs wave goodbye to eight seniors after starting all of them in the last game of the season, but Cannon said he's not that worried.

"We'll be competitive, but we won't be as old next year," Cannon said. "We'll have five seniors, six juniors and a big sophomore and freshman class

... The future is bright."

Newsham, who finished second on the team with 11 points, said she can't wait to get back on the field and compete.

"We have a whole bunch of freshmen and young people, but we've all had a year to adjust to each other's playing style," Newsham said. "We're all going to work really hard in the spring. Hopefully we'll keep building as time goes on."

Cepicky, who for the second time in her career was named to the Academic All-District team, said she plans to leave the soccer cleats on her memory shelf and pursue a career in accounting. Her resume includes a 3.97 grade point average.

"It's been the best place I can think of to play, the best environment for soccer, the best environment for school and just a great group of girls," she said.

Day 4: Homeward Bound

The only item left on the Alabama itinerary is the trip home. The season itinerary isn't even close to being finished.

As the team gets set for the MIAA conference tournament, Skoch said he will be focused on fine-tuning and getting some people to show more intensity and desire.

"At this stage, after this weekend, there are certain players on this team we need to play," he said. "There's a point where it's not x's and o's. It's just about attitude."

As Skoch is talking with his team at the end of the trip, he says, "I want you guys to remember one thing. It is a game, and I want you to have fun."

Don't put pressure on yourselves. Go out there and play because you know you can do it."