

## VOLLEYBALL

Wackerman garners 14th triple-double

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13th triple-double of the season with 12 kills, 22 assists and 14 digs. Freshman Whitney Boehler, playing in her first game as libero, added 18 digs for the squad.

Boehler said she had no problems switching to libero.

"I had been playing outside hitter for the season, and then I hurt my shoulder," she said. "Coach [Skoch] moved me to libero, and it has worked out. I felt comfortable in that position."

The team traveled to Washburn University (Kan.) on Saturday afternoon to take on the Lady Blues for the MIAA tournament championship and the conference automatic bid.

The team jumped out early in game one, leading 14-9, but the Lady Blues charged back. With the score knotted up at 28 apiece, senior middle hitter Micaela Walter stepped up her game.

She delivered key kills that sent the team to game point, and she teamed up with Wackerman to block a Washburn attack to give the 'Dogs a 31-29 victory.

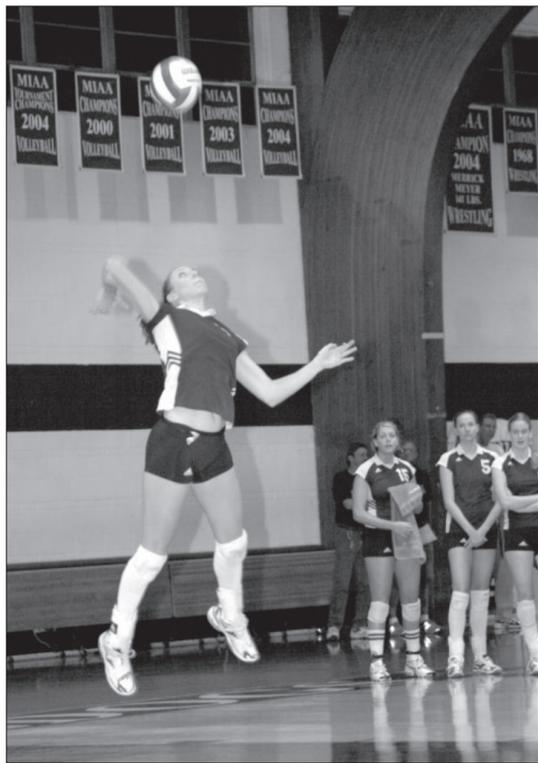
The 'Dogs were in a similar position in game two, up 23-20 before Washburn mounted another comeback. Washburn won the game 30-27 as they were able to sidout the 'Dogs for the victory.

With the match split at one game apiece, the Bulldog offense and defense came to life.

The purple and white captured game three 30-22 to take a 3-1 lead. The 'Dogs and Lady Blues fought their way all through game four, but junior outside hitter Sarah Shearman vanquished all hopes of a Washburn victory with three kills in a final 4-1 run to seal the Bulldog victory.

Boehler said the team finally is coming together in time for the post-season.

"Everyone is real confident," she said. "We are starting to gel



Chris Tharp/Index  
Junior outsider hitter/setter Kelsey Wackerman hits a jump serve against Central Missouri during the MIAA tournament.

better as a team. We are getting some chemistry."

Wackerman garnered her 14th triple-double of the season with 10 kills, 41 assists, and 16 digs. Walter, playing in her hometown of Topeka, Kan., had 18 kills, one short of her career high.

Skoch said the two victories will give the team confidence heading further into postseason play.

"We looked great beating two great teams," he said. "That's just a great way to start off the playoffs. The teams we beat were solid. It gives us a two seed and allows Harding and Washburn to box it out in the first round and not us."

The Bulldogs travel to Florence, Ala., for the South Central Regional tournament as the No. 2 seed. The squad begins its 2005 NCAA tournament experience facing off against the University of Alabama-Huntsville tonight. The 'Dogs defeated UAH earlier in the season 3-0.

Senior middle hitter Tiffany Graham said the team is working on its defense in preparation for the stretch run.

"The approach isn't that much different from years past," she said. "We are trying to get that hustle. Our mood is really positive, and the team is going to work hard and give it our all."

## MARCH | Senior middle hitters affect team

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squad that has re-established itself as a national power.

Skoch said these three are really interchangeable as the postseason draws near.

"Our middles are our best players," Skoch said. "We have three of them, so if one is tired, I can sub one in. We've had multiple games where two out of the three are really good. They block well, and they can produce on offense."

If Graham and Walter destroy offenses the same way they did in past postseason play, the purple and white could win the South Central Regional title for the third time in four years.

None of the top teams in the regional - University of North Alabama, CMSU, Washburn and Emporia State University - have two middle hitters as strong as Walter and Graham (or a third as strong as the 'Dogs' Megan Remley).

Both Walter and Graham hit more than .330 on the season while Walter's .340 mark ranked second in the MIAA.

No. 1 seed UNA is the only other team in the South Central Region to sport two players - GSC East Division Player of the Year Vanessa Ferretti and Megan Stout - who hit more than .340 on the campaign. With Graham and Walter at full strength, the 'Dogs have a balanced attack that yielded five players with double-figure kills against Washburn.

As a team, the purple and white hit .222 against the Lady Blues, the second-highest hitting percentage against them the entire season.

This was a far cry from the first two matches against Washburn. Earlier this year, the 'Dogs eked out a 3-2 victory, but Walter only hit .286 with 11 kills, and Graham didn't even record an attack.

In a 3-1 loss to Washburn later in the year, Graham hit .269 while Walter never saw the court.

The three Washburn matches

serve as a display of the entire year. The purple and white are 6-5 against South Central Regional teams, but there is a marked contrast when Walter and Graham see consistent playing time.

In the six wins, Graham is hitting .542 while Walter attacks at a .289 rate. In the losses (Graham didn't play in the first loss to UNA back on Sept. 10, and Walter missed two other losses), Graham has a .192 mark while Walter hits .211.

As a team, the 'Dogs also regress without their two middles, hitting .262 in the six wins and a meager .211 in the losses.

Boehler said Graham has had a tremendous impact for the team.

"When Tiffany [Graham] steps on the court, she has a definite impact," she said. "For some reason, people can't seem to get her balls up when she hits them."

Skoch said each middle hitter has improved steadily since the season began.

"Micaela [Walter] improved her blocking, but offensively, I think she is the best middle in the conference as far as hitting around the block," Skoch said. "Not many middles can do that. Tiffany [Graham] has gotten in shape, and she sees things better on the court."

Graham said she and her middle teammates are always competing in practice.

"[We] have always had a friendly competition," she said. "But we're all friends. We push each other really well to succeed. We are competing for the same spot, so we make each other become better."

Skoch said that if they all play well and near to perfection, no team in the country can beat the 'Dogs.

With those three middle hitters combining with Shearman and Wackerman, it could be all purple and white in the South Central Region Saturday night.

Sports Editor Conor Nicholl contributed to this report.

## HOUSTON |

Five keys for volleyball entering the playoffs

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is 19.3 digs per game. The 'Dogs garnered about 3.3 blocks per game - the season average is 2.4 per game.

It's obvious that improvement in these areas is helping the 'Dogs significantly, but why are they improving so much now?

"Our girls get pumped up for postseason," assistant coach Ben Briney said.

The thing about postseason is if you lose once, your season is finished. With the matches against the University of North Alabama and the three-match skid against CMSU, Emporia State University and Washburn earlier in the year, the losses didn't mean as much. Yes, they cost the squad its coveted No. 1 ranking and Truman's chance to host the conference tournament and regionals. But the season didn't end.

### 2. We're No. 8! We're No. 8!

As I stated in my earlier column about volleyball, being ranked No. 1 means you have a big red "X" painted on your jersey. Every team is going to play with 110 percent intensity and passion whenever it plays against you.

The 'Dogs are on the other side of the spectrum now. They're not ranked No. 1 anymore. In fact, they're not even No. 1 in our region. Now, they're the ones who will be playing with 110 percent intensity and passion when or if they face UNA.

Not only are the Lions ranked No. 1 in the region, but also the 'Dogs already lost to them two times this season. Ever hear the expression "third time's a charm?"

3. Freshman libero Whitney Boehler. So Boehler isn't Truman's regular starter at libero. So what?

"Whitney has done great at practice, and she has been very consistent at serve-serve and defense," head coach Jason Skoch said. "We need consistency on every play."

Boehler had 18 digs against CMSU and led the squad with 23 digs in the championship match against the Lady Blues, helping the team average about 26.7 digs per game, about seven digs more than the season average.

She also has committed only four receiving errors for the year.

So should Skoch put the more experienced liberos, sophomores Marti Joyer and Amanda Holliday, back in when the squad's season is on the line? If it's not broke, don't fix it. Boehler is doing a great job at libero thus far, and I would suggest the team sticks with what's been working as of late.

### 4. "Setting" things up. Truman

has four all-MIAA hitters in juniors Kelsey Wackerman and Sarah Shearman and seniors Micaela Walter and Megan Remley. They all can hit with the best of them. However, they can't hit unless they have good sets.

The Bulldogs averaged just 13 assists per game in the UNA loss Nov. 5. However, they averaged 16 assists per game for the season and 19.1 assists per game in the last two matches.

Wackerman and junior Christine Wagener need to assist the hitters by placing the ball right where it needs to be. If the two setters can accomplish this task, look for a repeat of the third game in the most recent CMSU match.

5. Wackerman. She's the MIAA MVP. She has 14 triple-doubles. She's second on the team in kills and assists and third in digs. Wackerman has to show up to ensure Bulldog success.

So as Christmas and Hanukkah approach, I'm getting my gift wish list ready. Hopefully, life will be nice and get me a national championship from Truman volleyball.

## NICHOLL | Soccer finishes great year

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said in his postgame speech. "This was a team that set records this season."

The team left its stamp in the Bulldog annals. Its 17-3-2 mark was the second-most wins in school history. Its 0.49 goals against average also ranked second in the University's record books, while its 62 wins during a four-year span is the most ever by the Bulldogs.

The 'Dogs did more than set records. They battled. After playing a brutal opening schedule and starting the season 3-2 - including a 4-0 loss to SIUE - the 'Dogs found their backs against the wall.

Every game became a must-win. Many teams, especially those with a new coach, would have wilted under the ever-intensifying pressure.

Not this year. Not this team. They made adjustments, changing from a front four on defense to a 3-5-2 formation with Atwood acting as the sweeper, the last line of defense between the opposition and Gibson in goal.

The result was one of the greatest two-month runs in any sport in Bulldog history.

After going 14-1-1 - including outscoring opponents 23-2 during their final 11 matches - the 'Dogs found themselves back on SIUE's pitch, one win from the Elite Eight.

Tonight, this team was a different squad from the one that lost 4-0 earlier in the year. It had felt the pressure time after time this season - including winning a 1-0

pressure cooker against Rockhurst in the first round of the playoffs Thursday night. Saturday seemed like just another step on the route to a nationals.

After 110 minutes and two overtimes, the scoreboard read 0-0, but the team was certainly up to the task. Whether it was Gibson making yet another diving save, or senior back Mike Boyle stopping SIUE's speedy Mike Banner again and again, or Birrell, Clayes or Pottgeisser trying valiantly to put the ball in the net, or senior forward Nate Gaudreault playing on a bad hamstring that gave him pain every time he ran, or senior midfielder Wes Frevert, a role player for most of the season, constantly clearing the ball, winning headers, creating opportunities and taking shots, trying to will his team to win, or ....

The first 110 minutes was a microcosm of the season. The 'Dogs kept fighting, kept battling. They just couldn't score.

"I think Truman tonight was the toughest team we played this entire year," SIUE assistant coach Kevin Kalish said.

And after SIUE's Brian Higgins kick in the shootout sealed the victory, the magical season came to an end.

"At this level, at this game, it's not about talent," Atwood said. "It's about who works harder. Tonight, we worked harder. We just didn't win."

But they should still earn a victory in the hearts and minds of the Bulldog faithful for their incredible season and their undeniable performance Saturday.

## Men's Soccer By the Numbers

**17-3-2** The wins represent the second most in school history, behind only the 20-1 campaign in 2003.

**0.49** goals allowed per game. Again, this is the second best defensive effort in school history, behind only 2003's 0.42 total.

**10-0-2** record for the 'Dogs over the final 12 games. One loss from potentially missing the playoffs, the purple and white became one of the nation's best teams.

**16** senior midfielder Marty Clayes' assists this season rank second on the University's all-time list. His 40 career assists tie for first with Matt Byer (1998-2001) and he is the only player in Bulldog history to lead his team in assists all four years.

**14** number of players who wore the Bulldog jersey for the last time on Saturday.

## SOCCER | Bulldogs ends season with an overall 17-3-2 record

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second Bulldog penalty shot, but again, the home team answered to tie the score through two rounds. Then things fell apart.

Crook stopped senior midfielder Kevin Barry's next shot, and when SIUE's junior forward co-captain John Matthews scored, the Cougars gained the upper hand through three rounds. Senior forward Paul Link then outguessed a diving Crook, but his shot hit the left post, giving senior forward Brian Higgins the chance to shut the door on the Bulldogs' season.

He converted on his attempt, ending the match with one round to go and a two-goal advantage for SIUE.

"The first time we played these guys, we didn't show up, and [SIUE] knows they got out of here by the skin of their teeth tonight," head coach Duke Cochran said. "The better team doesn't always win when it comes down to penalty shots. Historically, if you look at the World Cup or any other big tournament, everyone will say that.

It's just a tough way to lose."

SIUE advances to take on Carson-Newman College (Tenn.) on Saturday night for the right to go to the Final Four, but the 'Dogs left a deep impression, both mentally and physically, on the Cougars.

"Give credit to Truman's coaches and players because we knew we were going to get a dogfight tonight," SIUE assistant coach Kevin Kalish said. "If we would have played another 40 minutes, you likely would have seen the same score line because both teams played really tough tonight."

The 'Dogs advanced to the regional championship by winning another hard-fought match against the Rockhurst University Hawks. Clayes scored the only goal of the match - ironically, a penalty shot - in the 38th minute to lead the 'Dogs to the victory. Gibson posted his 35th career shutout and 13th of the season in the win.

The Bulldog season came to a close with a 17-3-2 overall record as the final game officially is recorded

as a draw. The team outscored their opponents 53-11, a testament to the strength of the offense as well as the overall intensity of the defense. Clayes was the team leader in assists (16) and co-lead the team in goals with senior forward Sean Birrell (nine). Senior forward Nate Gaudreault tallied eight goals on the season while Pottgeisser finished with five goals and four assists. The only underclassman to finish with double-digit points was sophomore midfielder Tony Novelty, who had 10 points.

Gibson completed the year with nearly 2,000 minutes logged between the pipes, posting a 0.50 goals against average, 13 shutouts and 73 saves.

"This was a record-breaking team we had here," Cochran said. "This team set some great records both at our school and in the nation. It's tough when you have that many seniors to lose like that, but I just want the guys to be proud of what they accomplished because we came a long way and did a lot of great things this season."

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