

# Quincy picks up two against Bulldogs

BY BLAKE TOPPMEYER  
Assistant Sports Editor

The Truman baseball team came within one out of earning its fifth win of the season Tuesday.

But with two outs in the bottom of the seventh and final inning, Quincy University's Nathan Warner pushed a single between the first and second basemen to drive in two runs and give the Hawks a 3-2 lead.

The Bulldogs threatened in the bottom of the seventh after freshman Kevin Zukaitis, who was pinch hitting, led off the inning with a single. Zukaitis eventually advanced to third base but was stranded there when freshman center fielder Matt July grounded out to end the game.

Quincy's 3-2 victory finalized a doubleheader sweep for the Hawks, who are 15-0 against Truman (4-29) since losing to the Bulldogs in February 1998.

The two runs in the seventh prevented freshman starting pitcher Eric Radel from picking up his second win of the season. Radel pitched a complete game, walked none and allowed seven hits with none going for extra bases.

"I just didn't try to overthrow and just kept the ball down for the most part, and the defense made some plays," Radel said.

Quincy's two-run seventh inning helped the Hawks overcome a home run by freshman right fielder Joshua Dilday to put the Bulldogs ahead 2-1 in the sixth inning.

In Game 1 of the doubleheader, junior starting pitcher Corey Tomasek pitched six innings and allowed four earned runs, but it wasn't enough to prevent Quincy from claiming a 5-2 win.

"The sad thing for Corey Tomasek is we screwed up a bunt coverage in the [second] inning," head coach Dan Davis said. "It led to three runs. That's unfortunate."

Junior shortstop Neil Bleish picked up one of the two Bulldog hits in the game when he connected on his fourth home run of the season to draw Truman to within 3-2 in the sixth inning.

In the two games combined, the 'Dogs totaled just seven hits against a Quincy pitching staff with a season earned run average of 4.47.

The losses to the Hawks came after the Bulldogs were a part of a record-setting game Saturday in Game 1 of a four-game series with Fort Hays State University. However, the records were not the kind the Bulldogs would've liked.

The Tigers trounced the Bulldogs 32-5 in the opening game, which featured rain, sleet and strong wind gusts. Wind conditions helped enable Fort Hays to hit eight home runs and set an MIAA single-game record with 59 total bases. The Tigers' 32 runs was a school record for runs scored in a single game.

On the Truman side, the game marked the fourth time in the 42-year history of the program that



Junior shortstop Neil Bleish connects with a pitch to launch his team-leading fourth home run of the season in the sixth inning of Game 1 Tuesday against Quincy University.

the Bulldogs allowed 30 runs or more, and it was the most runs Truman has ever surrendered to an MIAA opponent.

"It was a rough experience being out there," sophomore left fielder Keaton Jones said. "[I was] standing out in the outfield and watching balls fly over my head, and I'm sure the other guys felt the same way.

We felt kind of helpless. It was pretty rough."

Sparked by doubles from freshman third baseman Matt Herrick and senior first baseman Larry Hall, the Bulldogs took a 4-0 lead in the top of the first inning. But the Tigers responded with nine runs in both the first and second innings. Fort Hays hit five home runs in the first two innings.

"I think it was supposed to be 15 to 20 mph winds with gusts up to 40, and it was blowing straight out the whole game," Davis said. "And that's what their team centered around. They hit fly balls. It was a perfect situation for them to hit fly balls in. Everything that was hit up in the air pretty much traveled out of the yard."

Tomasek pitched just 0.2 innings and Zukaitis, who came on in relief, could not make it through the second inning. This left the Bulldogs needing someone to provide some innings because the team needed to save its three starting pitchers slated for the series' final three games. Davis turned to freshman reliever Andy Updike.

Updike gave the Bulldogs what they needed, pitching 3.1 innings of relief. In the process, however, he allowed 17 runs — an MIAA single-game record for most runs allowed by a pitcher.

"I wasn't really thinking about giving up runs — I was just thinking about getting outs and trying to round out the game as quick as possible," said Updike, whose outing was interrupted twice by weather delays.

Updike did pitch the only shutout inning for the Bulldogs by posting a zero in the third inning.

Fort Hays' Game 1 victory set the tone for the rest of the series. The Tigers won Game 2 16-5 and Game 3 11-7. In Sunday's final game, Truman led most of the way, only to have Fort Hays score two runs in the bottom of the eighth and claim a 15-14 Game 4 victory.

The Bulldog lineup did show improvement throughout the series. In the four games, Truman hit .325 and scored 31 runs.

"I thought we competed well," Davis said. "We ran into a team that's hitting on all cylinders."

# Bleish earns playing time by swinging a hot bat

BY COREY JAROS  
Staff Reporter

Junior shortstop Neil Bleish presents a dilemma for head coach Dan Davis.

Bleish is leading the Bulldogs in batting average, runs batted in, home runs, walks and stolen bases while hitting in the middle of the lineup this year. He also committed the most errors on the team last year, and he again has the most so far this spring.

"He was not in the starting lineup to start the year," Davis said. "It's not like we start the season off with one lineup. We give everybody a chance to play

and let them fight it out for a job. Recently Neil [Bleish] has been hitting real well, so we've been playing him a lot."

Bleish said he did not let missing the starting lineup for Truman back in February get him down.

"I've been a starter for a while, so it did kind of motivate me to work harder and get back into the starting lineup," Bleish said. "I've been trying to play faster on defense, like being more aggressive on ground balls."

Bleish has been a reliable source of offensive production since he first arrived at Truman,

hitting at least .270 in his first two seasons and now hitting .340 in 2008.

"In the off-season I spent a lot of time working out, and by being stronger it helps me get more bat speed," Bleish said. "I think that's the main key — I have been hitting a lot more line drives this year than in the past."

Bleish's 32 hits leads the team, with four of those going for home runs and two for triples, both team highs. He also has the most walks and the second most runs scored for the Bulldogs. Junior pitcher Corey Tomasek said consistently putting runs on the

board boosts the pitching staff's motivation to shut down the opposition.

"When we have the lead, you feel like it's your obligation to stay in the lead," Tomasek said. "Your No. 1 job when your team gets the lead is to go out and put up a zero and get right back in the dugout so the offense can go back out and score more runs."

There have been several instances this year when errors on defense gave those runs right back. Bleish said he has put a lot of effort into improving his defense, mainly by improving his foot speed.

"I think that the thing that has

hurt me in the past is I let the ball come to me, and then it ends up taking bad hops," Bleish said. "I am trying to go and get the ball before it has a chance to take those bad hops."

Tomasek also said playing good defense helps improve the pitching staff's options on the mound.

"When you have a good defense playing behind you, it gives you a lot of confidence to throw a lot more strikes," he said. "You can attack the hitters more, knowing that your defense can make the plays for you behind you."

The Bulldogs currently are

3-19 in MIAA conference play and 4-29 overall. They have 16 remaining games scheduled before the MIAA tournament at Community America Ballpark in Kansas City, Kan. Bleish said he has high expectations for himself and the team.

"I want to definitely stay above .300 for the rest of the season, as a personal goal," Bleish said. "But as a team, I don't want to lose another series. I think that we should win every series from here on out. We are a young team, but we are getting games under our belt, and I think you can see the progress that we are making."



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