

TENNIS | Ochs on 20-match singles winning streak, and Blair's 29-4 mark help women to 18-3 record, men win 8-1 against Quincy and now 11-4

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 "We accomplished what we set out to do, and that was to go out there and win all the matches," Kendall said. "When you win five out of five matches, that's the best thing. We had a couple matches, here and there, individual matches we didn't win. ... All in all, five for five's not bad."
 Two players for the Bulldogs have been pivotal in the women's success during the season. Blair has been an anchor for the Bulldogs since her freshman season in 2005. In her first two years at Truman, she lost only four singles matches, winning

an astounding 47 matches in that span. Blair played in the No. 3 spot in the lineup her freshman year, when she had a 19-2 record, and moved up to the No. 2 spot halfway through her sophomore season, where she compiled a 28-4 record. To this point in the 2008 season, she has compiled an overall record of 29-4.
 "[Blair's] game is built around consistency, not making mistakes, running the ball down," Kendall said. "It's hard for other players to put the ball away on her. They make a lot of mistakes — she makes them hit a lot of balls."
 Blair said she has really en-

joyed playing singles this year. "I just go into every match, not necessarily expecting to win, but just confident in my singles play knowing that I've given my best and seeing what comes out of it," Blair said. "I've really played pretty loose. I've just had a lot of fun playing singles this year, and it's turned out well for me."
 Ochs has had a strong showing as well in her first season at the University. A Kirksville native, Ochs has been training with Kendall for a few years, and the results speak for themselves. Ochs is 28-2 and has not lost a singles match in the spring. She

has a 20-match singles winning streak.
 Ochs is playing in the No. 5 singles and No. 2 doubles team. "Amy [Ochs] is more of a power player," Kendall said. "She hits the ball hard and goes for a lot of shots. ... She is going to continue to get better, and she will probably, the further along she gets in her career, play higher in the lineup."
 Ochs has been working hard to improve her game since coming to college. "I've really been working on my consistency," Ochs said. "When I was in high school, one

of my biggest problems was [trying] to overpower everything, and I hit it out a lot. I've been working on that a lot more. I think I've improved a lot since I've been here. Coach Kendall's taught me a lot."
 Both Blair and Ochs had a strong showing along with their teammates this past weekend. Ochs and senior Jennifer Salmon won all the doubles matches they played, and Ochs won all her singles matches soundly. She never allowed her opponent to take more than three games in a set. Although Blair dropped all of her doubles matches, she won all of her singles matches.

The men were forced to play without No. 1 Peter Bracha for the majority of the weekend. Bracha played in his doubles match Saturday against Winona but did not play another match all weekend. Bracha sat out because of pain in his wrist, on which he recently had surgery.
 On Wednesday, the Bulldogs play at Quincy University. Friday, the teams take on Washburn University at home. The women play against Missouri Southern State University and Southwest Baptist University on Saturday. The men play against Southwest Baptist on Saturday as well.

SALMON | Senior No. 1 tennis player uses backhand, drop shot to attain 23-9 singles mark

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 It's that backhanded shot that has helped the 5-foot-2 Salmon play in Truman's No. 1 singles position for three years and compile a 74-46 career singles record. And it's a backhanded shot that she had years to develop.
 Salmon first stepped onto the tennis court at age six, when she attended a clinic run by Lanny Wake, who later became Salmon's high school tennis coach at Cameron (Mo.) High School.
 "She was really enthusiastic about the game," Wake said. "It wasn't anything that her parents forced on her or wanted her to do. It's something that she took on herself to do. She, I think, was pretty self-motivated to become a player. She was just a little bitty thing, and she still is a pretty little bitty thing size-wise. She really took to the game. From that point on, she just started developing her game."
 Salmon said that first clinic sparked her interest in tennis. "I wouldn't have played tennis necessarily if it hadn't been for the clinic he held," she said.

After the clinic, Salmon started to hit tennis balls in her driveway against the garage door and eventually became a standout at Cameron, where she compiled a 95-9 singles record and qualified for the state tournament four times.
 She was the No. 1 player all four years at Cameron, even during a freshman season when the team had a senior-laden roster. Wake said the turning point for Salmon came during that freshman season when she "started thinking a lot on the court."
 "She did a real good job of really analyzing her opponents and making them hit to her strengths, and she would attack their weakness," Wake said.
 Salmon's success did not slow down after she came to Truman. After splitting time between the Nos. 2 and 3 singles positions her freshman year, she has anchored the No. 1 spot for three seasons.

Salmon has embraced the challenge of competing against the opposition's top player for three years. "She never backs off of anybody," head coach Pete Kendall said. "She doesn't let anybody intimidate her and never has."
 After earning Honorable Mention All-MIAA last season, Salmon is having an equally successful campaign this year. She has helped put the women, who have an 18-3 overall record, in good position to qualify for the Div. II NCAA tournament for the first time since Salmon's freshman year.
 In addition to her backhand, Salmon's drop shot has helped her compile the second-best winning percentage (72 percent) of any player who plays No. 1 for the eight MIAA schools with women's tennis programs.
 "To be truthful, lots of the

female players don't like to get up to the net," Kendall said. "So she draws them up there with that drop shot. And if they can get to it, that just sets her up winning points fairly easily."
 Salmon also has gained her share of wins on the doubles spectrum, despite playing with five different doubles partners in four years. This year, she primarily has been coupled with Ochs, and the duo has a 19-4 record.
 Not only has Salmon been able to provide balance to the skill set of Ochs, who described herself as "more of a forehand player," but Ochs said Salmon has helped bring about her personal development.
 "I was super excited when I found out that I was going to play with the No. 1 player, and I really feel like she's taught me a lot," Ochs said. "I just feel like every day I play with her I'm learning new things."
 And as long as Salmon's backhand — which started to take form 16 years ago at a tennis clinic in Cameron — doesn't falter, Ochs should be prepared to receive more high-fives in coming matches.

COLUMN | Recent events in the world of sports help reaffirm why games are still fun

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 When he sank his tap-in on 18 for the green jacket, I was genuinely happy.
 I love the bonding that occurs through sports. As soon as the mercury in the thermometer started heading north, a few friends and I began planning a friendly softball game. No score will be kept, no one can strike out — just a few friends getting together to play a game.
 None of us are really that good, but the fact that we all get excited by the thought of heading out to the dirt infield to play a kids' game makes me smile. I enjoy nothing more than attempting to turn a double play or hitting the dirt for a slide.
 I love that athletes can do things that I can only dream of. Senior hurdler Sean Bergstedt has been having a nice outdoor track season. He's set two meet records and has already earned an NCAA provisional time. I watched him practice last week, and I almost started to laugh.
 The hurdle is not that high off the ground, but I sure as heck can't jump over it. I would probably have trouble clearing it even if I wasn't running.

But there was Bergstedt, flying around the track and clearing the hurdles with a look on his face that seemed to suggest it was pretty easy for him.
 I love the playoffs. Right now the NHL playoffs are going on, and the NBA playoffs are gearing up. In hockey especially, the games get so much better. I don't have a favorite NHL team in the playoffs right now, but I still am keeping close tabs on what's happening.
 Everyone just steps up their play. Guys who are injured get the toughness to come back and play. A left winger for the Philadelphia Flyers took a shot to the groin and almost had to have a testicle removed. I would have sat out an entire year. The player, Patrick Thoresen, played the next game.
 Plus, nothing beats sudden-death overtime in the playoffs. One game means so much in a playoff series that the overtime periods are intense. It's awesome.
 Yeah, the sports world is filled with moron athletes who don't realize they are being paid a lot of money to play a game. But I still love sports.

FOOTBALL | Bulldogs spending spring practice looking for replacements for two honorable mention All-MIAA members of the secondary

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 So at the corner position we feel like we are still strong. We still got Matt Burel back at safety. Now we're just trying to find who's going to be that other safety. It's not as bad as what it may seem."
 Besides the battle in the secondary, the Bulldogs are continuing to adjust to a new defensive coordinator, Ryan Nourse. The 'Dogs will continue to use the same 3-4 formation under Nourse. Nourse is the fourth defen-

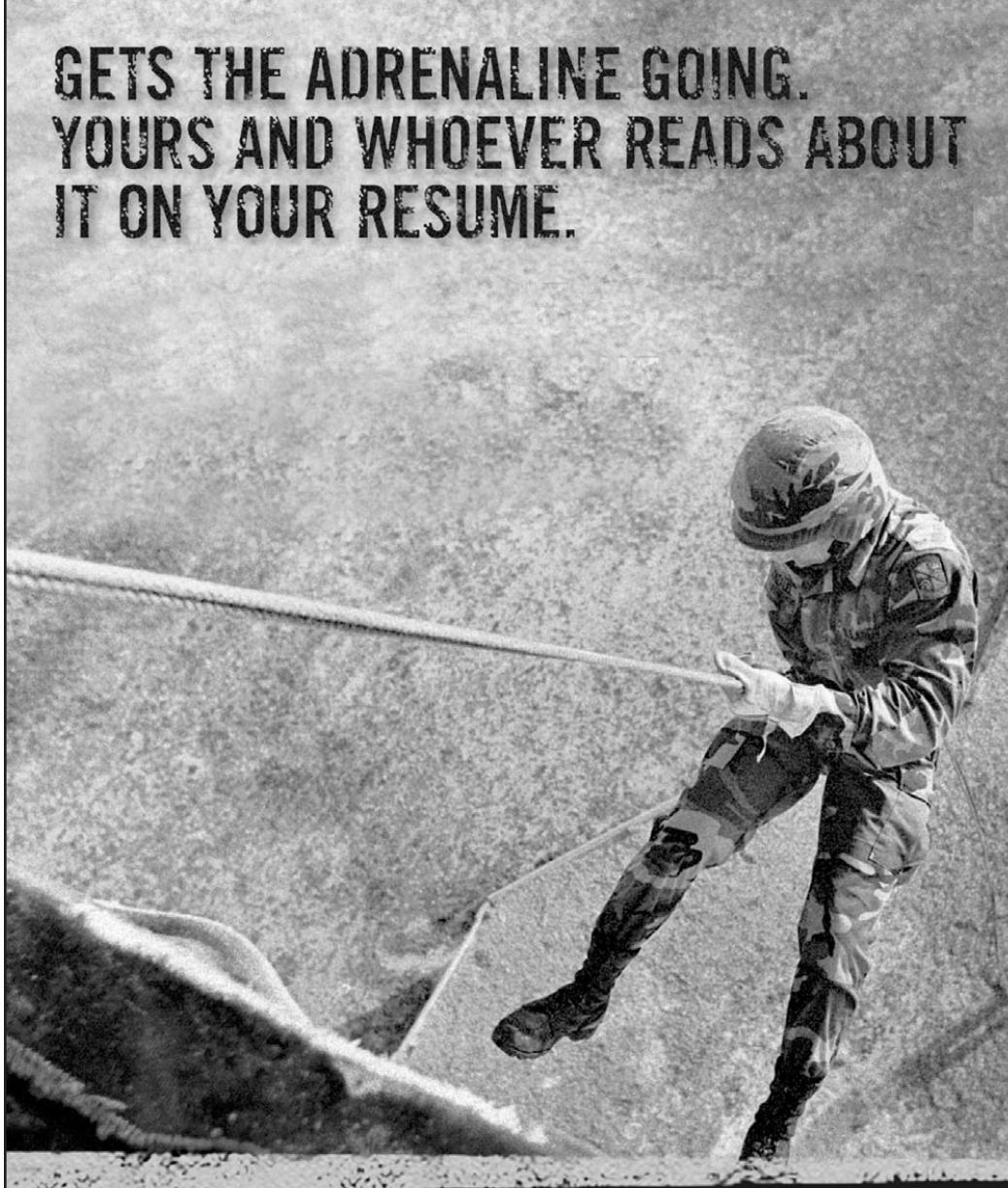
sive coordinator in four years.
 "We are spending a lot of time meeting with the position groups, going over defense starting with the basics," Rodriguez said. "We're trying to learn what each position has to do each snap of the ball till the play is done with. Then just going out and practice everything from start to finish."
 Rodriguez said the change in coordinators is helping out defensive backs because it allows them to play faster.

Kearney said the secondary has done well so far adjusting to Nourse. "Well it's been a pretty smooth transition," Kearney said. "Some of the things that we're doing now we did in the past, so similar concepts, just different terminology."
 Burel also said the team is making the transition well.
 "Well, we're just kind of working together as a group," Burel said. "Coach Kearney is kind of stepping up the intensity and his expectations

of us. Just trying to find some people to fill those holes because they were good players for us."
 Burel played in all 11 games last season at safety and was fourth on the team in tackles with 74. He was second on the team with four pass break-ups.
 "Right now we are just trying to get everything installed," Burel said. "Just get everyone to know it so we can play at a fast level. We're just really doing a lot of repetition and watching a lot of film to correct what

we are doing wrong."
 A solid secondary will go a long way to improve a defense that finished last in the MIAA in total defense, giving up more than 460 yards per game. The defense ranked ninth in scoring defense, giving up more than 37 points per game.
 The team is continuing spring practice this week. The 'Dogs will finish up the spring with the annual spring game at 7 p.m. April 26 at Stokes Stadium.


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