

# Softball falls to 12-13

BY JACK NICHOLL  
Staff Reporter

The women's softball team has slowed since the end of Midterm Break.

The Bulldogs (12-13, 0-4 MIAA) played 13 games during the past two weeks, including three MIAA games and five games in the March 29-30 Nebraska-Omaha Tournament. The team finished at 3-10 in the two-week span.

The struggles continued with two losses yesterday at home versus conference foe Northwest Missouri State University. Senior Katie Noski started the first game, pitching five-plus innings in the 4-3 extra-inning loss. In the second game the Truman women fell behind early and never recovered, losing 3-0.

"One thing is the pitching staff has been giving up runs in the first inning, so that kind of sets a bad tone for the game," Noski said. "I think that is one thing that has changed [from the beginning of the season] — giving up runs at the beginning of games. We're getting behind, and we're always playing catch-up."

After starting the season 9-3, the Bulldogs lost eight of nine before winning two games to close the Nebraska-Omaha Tournament. Seven of those eight losses were by two runs or fewer. In the three wins, the team won by an average of more than five runs a game.

In 25 games this season, the team has allowed 17 runs in the first inning compared

to only 57 the rest of the game. Head coach Erin Brown said falling behind early puts added pressure on the hitters and pitchers and that the team sometimes thinks it needs to make something happen. Even with the first-inning woes, Truman was tied for first in the MIAA with a 2.73 ERA going into Wednesday's games.

The pitching staff has surrendered 16 home runs, negating a strong defense for the 'Dogs.

"We would almost rather give up a walk than a two-run home run, especially when the game is tied," Brown said.

Truman started the two-week span March 20 with its home opener, a rain makeup against Southwest Minnesota State University. The teams played doubleheaders on consecutive days, with Truman losing the first three games by two runs each before avoiding a sweep with a 10-3 victory in the last game.

Noski (1.55 ERA) got the no-decision in the first game and the win in the fourth game, pitching 13.2 innings and only allowing two earned runs. Her control also was precise, only allowing two walks to 11 strikeouts in the two games.

After the four home games, the team traveled to Central Missouri University for a two-game set to open the MIAA season. Truman was outscored 4-0 and 5-3.

The losing streak increased to five when the squad lost the first three games of the Nebraska-Omaha Tournament, including a 5-3 loss against No. 23 Minnesota-Manka-

to University and a 2-1 loss against No. 3 University of Nebraska-Omaha. The team rebounded with two wins to close the tournament going into yesterday's conference doubleheader against Northwest Missouri State University.

Truman will continue its conference schedule with games against six different teams in the next 17 days. As of last week, Truman was ranked third in the North Central Region.

"The next couple weeks is all conference games, and that is either going to make up or break us," Noski said.

The team is continuing to strand baserunners, which has been a season-long problem. Truman is fourth in the 10-team MIAA in batting average and second in total stolen bases but only eighth in runs scored.

"We don't have a lot of overpowering, huge girls," senior Christen Belcher said. "Hitting for base hits and running the bases quickly and smartly is our strategy."

During the two-week span, the team had runners on base multiple times with fewer than two outs and could not score.

"We need to figure out how to manufacture runs," Noski said. "Along with that, we need to have confidence that we can do it. ... Once we start hitting, everything is going to fall back in place again."

Junior Dani Mayer has been consistently strong for the 'Dogs. She leads the team with three home runs and is second on the team with a .357 average.



Blake Peterson/Index  
Junior Stephanie Martin winds up for a pitch in a game earlier this year. Martin started Game 2 against Northwest yesterday.



Joe Barker/Index  
Senior Christen Belcher breaks for second on a successful steal attempt yesterday against Northwest Missouri. She has 27 steals this season and 138 in her career.

## Softball racks up stolen bags

BY JACK NICHOLL  
Staff Reporter

For a team that has lost only one game this year by more than two runs, stolen bases can make the difference between a loss and a win in the record column.

The Bulldog softball team is stealing plenty, averaging nearly three a game. In 25 games this season, they have 64 stolen bases in 75 attempts. Truman's opponents have swiped 13 bases in 22 attempts.

Truman is 12th in Div. II and first in the MIAA in steals per game.

"Not only is it great that we can steal those bases and we don't have to rely on sacrifices, but it automatically puts us in scoring position to score more runs," head coach Erin Brown said.

Leading Truman are outfielders senior Christen Belcher and junior Dani Mayer, who normally hit one and three, respectively, in the lineup. Belcher is 27 for 32 in stolen base attempts, and Mayer is 20 for 22. Belcher was

sixth and Mayer 13th in the nation as of March 30.

Belcher is on pace to beat the 42 stolen bases she had last year. She had 24 stolen bases her freshman year and 45 her sophomore year. Belcher already holds the Truman career record for stolen bases.

A slap hitter who does not draw many walks, Belcher more than makes up for it with her speed. She attempts a steal almost every time she gets on base, and she almost always is moving on the first pitch.

"Sometimes we have to have patience because now that I'm a senior there are a lot of teams that I have played before, and they already know that I'm going to go," Belcher said. "A lot of times they will call a pitchout. Sometimes it is kind of a mind game between coach and the catcher."

Belcher has been on base 39 times this season and she has 32 stolen base attempts.

"She's really good at reading, watching the pitcher," Brown said. "If she goes on the chan-

geup, she's there by the time the catcher gets the ball."

Mayer is a power threat as well as a speed threat. She is leading Truman with three homeruns, but she also is fast enough for infield hits.

As fast as Belcher and Mayer are, they are both baserunners who know how to pick the right pitches on which to steal. Brown said she often gives them the green light to steal on their own.

"A lot of it isn't how fast you are, but how good you are at baserunning and sensing what is going to happen," Brown said.

Belcher and Mayer are the top two on the team in batting average, at bats, slugging percentage and on-base percentage, which in turn gives them more chances to steal than anyone else on the team.

Sophomore catcher Erica LaCombe is third on the team with a perfect 8 for 8 in stolen base attempts this season. Senior Kali Holleran has four and five more 'Dogs have at least one. LaCombe already

has matched her total from last year.

Belcher and Mayer are second and third in the MIAA in steals, and the duo, as well as LaCombe, are near the top of the league in steals per game.

Against baserunners as smart on the basepaths and as fast as Truman's are, there is little the opposition can do to prevent a stolen base.

"Sometimes the catcher will call a pitch out, but there's nothing you can really do," senior Katie Noski said.

Stealing third is also an option for the 'Dogs. Brown said the team will weigh its options depending on whether the third baseman or shortstop will cover on a steal. Brown said the batter sometimes will swing through a pitch to make it harder for the catcher to make a good throw.

Truman is second as a team in the MIAA behind Emporia State University. In the 10-team league, only two teams have at least half the stolen bases Truman does.



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For a full schedule of presentations, go to <gradeng.truman.edu>.

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