



Brian O'Shaughnessy/Index

Senior forward Nick Certa became the 22nd player in Bulldog history to score 1,000 points with his first-half three pointer last night.

# Northwest tops men's basketball team 61-49

BY BLAKE TOPPMEYER  
Assistant Sports Editor

Northwest Missouri State University saved its best perimeter shooting for the Bulldogs.

The Bearcats made a season-high 11 three pointers Wednesday night against the men's basketball team to help propel Northwest to a 61-49 victory in Bearcat Arena.

Northwest (16-6, 8-5) has won nine of its last 11 matchups against the Bulldogs (4-18, 3-9).

In their two games against Truman this season, the Bearcats shot 20-for-38 from behind the arc.

"I really think that they're the best team in the conference," junior guard Banks Estridge said prior to the game. "I think they're finding themselves a little bit right now. They're playing well."

Truman matched Northwest's good shooting in the first half and played the Bearcats to a 37-37 tie through the first 20 minutes. But Northwest staged a 14-3 run to begin the second half and battled through scoring slump midway through the second half to hold on to the win.

Senior forward Nick Certa pulled the Bulldogs to within seven points on a layup, but Northwest's John Hawkins drained a three — his third of the game — with 5:26 remaining to effectively finish off the 'Dogs.

Hawkins, who entered the game averaging less than three points per game but scored a total of 16 points in his two games against Truman this season, teamed up with fellow reserve player Kelvin Cayruth to help provide balanced scoring for Northwest. Six Bearcat players scored at least eight points.

"They're a good inside- and outside-[team]," freshman forward Ethan Freeman said. "They can shoot it from the outside, and then they have some mobile inside players."

Truman scored just 12 second half

points against the MIAA's best scoring defense after shooting 58 percent from the floor in the first half.

Patrick Fandja helped the 'Dogs remain close early. The junior forward, who was working against Matt Withers in the post, scored nine first half points on 4-for-6 shooting. But Fandja was shutout in the second half, which was one factor in the Bulldogs making just four second-half field goals.

For the 14th time this season, Nick Certa led the Bulldogs in scoring. He scored 15 points but shot just 5-for-16 from the field.

Certa reached a milestone in the game, scoring his 1,000th point with 58 seconds remaining in the first half. Certa received a pass at the top of the key at knocked down a three pointer in transition to become the 22nd Truman player to score 1,000 points in his career. Reaching the milestone on a three-point basket was fitting for the senior forward from Godfrey, Ill. Certa ranks 10th all-time in career three pointers made in the 89-year history of Bulldog basketball.

The Bulldogs came close to earning a victory Saturday but lost the lead late in the second half at Southwest Baptist University. The Bearcats, ranked 15th in the nation and atop the MIAA standings, prevailed 76-66.

Truman led by two points with less than nine minutes remaining, but an offensive rebound and layup by Southwest Baptist's John Tiemeyer sparked an 11-0 run that put the Bearcats ahead 65-56 with 5 1/2 minutes to play. The Bulldogs never could close the gap.

"When it came down to it being a close game, they just started making some plays and feeding off their crowd," Estridge said. "And they really took over that last [several] minutes."

Three Bulldog starters — Estridge, Freeman and Fandja — had four fouls each by the middle of the second half and all were on the bench during most of the Bearcats'

big run to break open the game.

Freeman said Southwest Baptist's tall roster, which includes three players who are 6-foot-7 or taller, might have contributed to the foul trouble of Truman's post players.

"They have some big guys," Freeman said. "[We] were trying to fight them early in the post. At times, the game is physical, and I guess the refs just weren't allowing that."

The Bulldogs beat the Bearcats by 20 points at Pershing Arena on Jan. 26 and tried to use the same formula of limiting SBU's outside shooting Saturday at Bolivar, Mo., where the Bearcats are undefeated this season.

The Bearcats entered the game first in the MIAA in three-point shooting at 43 percent, but made just 2 of 12 three pointers Saturday, compared to Truman's 6-for-17 shooting from beyond the arc. The two threes were the fewest the Bearcats have made since Nov. 25, 2006. Southwest Baptist shot only 28 percent from three-point range in its two games against the Bulldogs this season.

The Bearcats offset their poor long-range shooting effort Saturday by penetrating to the basket. On two-point field goals, SBU outshot the 'Dogs by almost 25 percent. Nick Kovacevich was the main threat around the rim. He scored 18 points, 10 of which were on layups.

"They just pushed the ball at us relentlessly," head coach Jack Schrader said. "Any time we were not back and ready to defend, they took advantage of it. If you're getting back as they arrive, they can score."

Certa led Truman in scoring. He finished with 15 points and 12 rebounds. Freshman guard Alex Henderson contributed 14 points off the bench.

The Bulldogs will return home to Pershing Arena on Saturday to host Washburn University (14-8, 6-7). The Ichabods are one spot ahead of the Bulldogs in the conference standings.

# Inconsistent foul shooting leads to losses for Bulldogs

BY BLAKE TOPPMEYER  
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Free throws are supposed to be easy points. But the 15-foot unguarded shots have proven to be anything but automatic for the men's basketball team.

The Bulldogs sit seventh in the conference in free-throw shooting, making 66.7 percent of their attempts. The percentage is Truman's lowest since the 2003-04 season.

Missed free throws have been the main cause behind Truman's two overtime losses this year, in which the 'Dogs combined to sink just 46.7 percent of their free throws.

In Truman's most recent overtime defeat — against the University of Central Missouri on Feb. 6 — the Bulldogs had a four-point advantage with less than a minute to play. But when Central Missouri forced the Bulldogs to try to win the game at the foul line, the 'Dogs failed to seal the victory. They missed five of six free-throw attempts in the final minute, which allowed the Mules to tie the game and win 65-64 in overtime.

"We missed [15] free throws, and we lost by one," junior guard Banks Estridge said. "If we make even just two or three of those, we win. At the same time, they were in foul trouble

early. So the last 10 minutes, we were shooting free throws. If we would have made some of those, we could've been up by double digits rather than making it close down the stretch."

Freshman forward Ethan Freeman was one of the culprits in the Bulldogs' poor free-throw shooting in the final minutes. He missed three of four attempts in the last 20 seconds of regulation and finished the game just 5-for-12 at the free-throw line.

Freeman has struggled all season at the charity stripe, where he shoots a team-low 49.4 percent.

"To me, it's just mental," Freeman said. "I just got to get to the line, block everything else out and focus. I don't know if I'm not focused or what the heck's going on. I need to get my head in the game and concentrate with it. But there are no excuses for having such low of a percentage. I need to help the team out, and that's part of my job is to make those free throws."

Freeman's poor free-throw percentage carries even more importance because he leads Truman in free-throw attempts with 87. No other Bulldog has attempted more than 67 free throws.

Freeman's style of play, which features a lot of low-post play and penetration to the basket, sets him up to get fouled a lot. But head coach Jack Schrad-

er said he isn't about to tell Freeman to modify his game.

"Ethan drives the ball really well, and he plays inside, so he's going to get fouled more," Schrader said. "... What am I going to do? Tell him to sit out [on the perimeter] and shoot threes? No. You just have to adjust. You want players to do what they do and do it well."

Freeman is just one contributor to Truman's low free-throw percentage. Estridge is hitting just 57.4 percent from the line. This is uncharacteristically low for Estridge, who entered the season as a career 78.3 percent free-throw shooter.

"[He's] trying too hard," Schrader said. "Most of the time when people have trouble at the free-throw line it's because they're trying too hard. It's like I always say: If you think about losing or missing, it is the worst thing. If you think about making it, or if you think about winning, that's the next worst thing. The only thing you can do is just go up and shoot it."

Estridge said he recently adjusted his stroke at the free-throw line, and in the last three games he has fared better, knocking down 10 of 14 attempts. The entire roster showed improvement Saturday at Southwest Baptist University, when the Bulldogs went 18-for-21 at the line. Truman followed that

up with a 10-for-12 free-throw effort Wednesday at Northwest Missouri State University.

Apart from Freeman and Estridge, the rest of the Bulldogs have combined to make 76.6 percent of their free throws this season.

Making the most of its free-throw opportunities is even more important for Truman because the team is last in the 10-team MIAA in free-throw attempts. The Bulldogs average just one free-throw shot every four possessions.

Free-throw percentage also has a correlation with MIAA teams' success. The conference's top three free-throw shooting teams — Missouri Southern State University, Northwest Missouri State University and Southwest Baptist — are also in the top three in the MIAA standings. In the Bulldogs' four wins this season, they shot a combined 74.6 percent from the line.

So if the 'Dogs want to add to their win total, it appears they should start by consistently making more free throws.

"It's the easiest shot in basketball," Estridge said. "We all can hit it. All the time, we'll just come out here [in practice] and knock them down. But in a game, you get yourself thinking, 'All right, I have to make this. I haven't been shooting free throws well.' If you can just stop doing that and just step up and make it, you're better off."

# Free-throw struggles

The men's basketball team has been plagued by poor free-throw shooting at times this year.

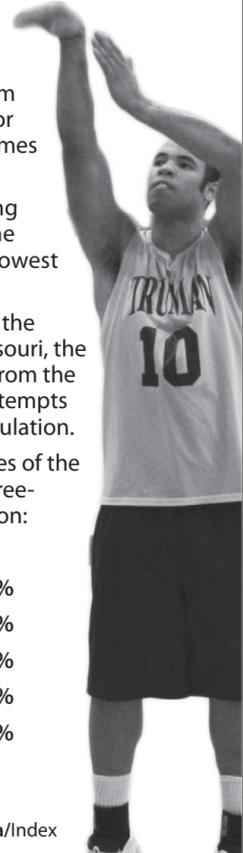
The Bulldogs are shooting just 66.7 percent from the free-throw line — their lowest mark since 2003-04.

In Truman's Feb. 6 loss to the University of Central Missouri, the Bulldogs shot 14-for-29 from the line and missed 5-of-6 attempts in the final minute of regulation.

Below are the percentages of the Bulldogs with the most free-throw attempts this season:

- Ethan Freeman 49%
- Patrick Fandja 72%
- Banks Estridge 57%
- Nick Certa 84%
- Alex Henderson 94%

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