



LATE WIN

Men defeat Missouri Western 73-69

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SPORTS



Basketball: 3 p.m. Saturday
Feb. 23 vs. Fort Hays State



Basketball: 1 p.m. Saturday
Feb. 23 vs. Fort Hays State

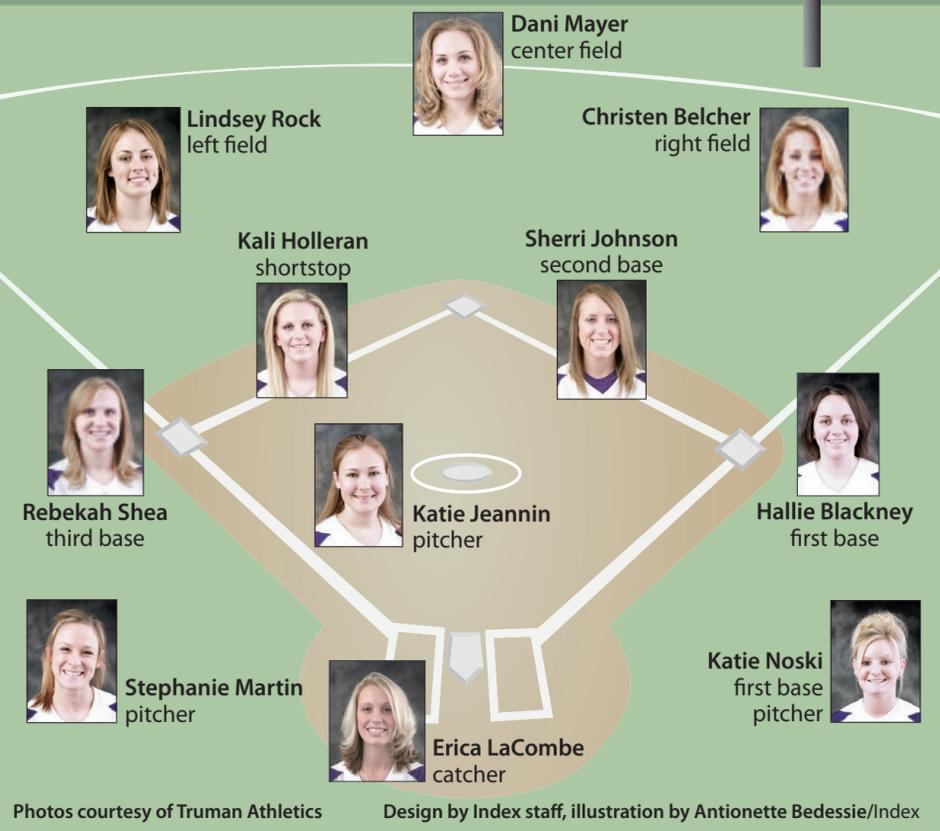
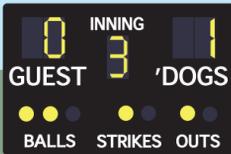
Thursday, February 21, 2008

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Around the horn

With nine returning starters, the softball team will have some familiar faces taking the field in 2008:



Photos courtesy of Truman Athletics Design by Index staff, illustration by Antionette Bedessie/Index

Softball returns nine starters

BY JACK NICHOLL
Staff Reporter

The softball team is looking to rebound from a down season.

The Bulldogs return nine starters from last year's squad. The team has seven seniors with multiple years of experience, head coach Erin Brown has a year under her belt at Truman and the recruiting class is four times the size of last year's.

After 10 straight winning seasons, including seven appearances in the NCAA regionals, the team took a step backward last year with a 17-29 overall record and a seventh-place 7-12 record in the MIAA. The women have their minds set on making it back to the tournament.

"Our goals this season is to win conference, make it to regionals, and obviously our overall goal would be to make it to the NCAA tournament," sophomore catcher Erica LaCombe said. "... We expect a huge season. I think every single person on the team does."

The team returns all eight position player starters from last year's squad and two of its top three pitchers. The team did lose alumnus Ashley MacDougal, who led the team in innings pitched and strikeouts and paced the team with a 3.20 earned run average. Junior Stephanie Martin replaced MacDougal, who is now a student-assistant pitching coach. Martin had success at Southwest Baptist for two years, and then she was forced to redshirt last year after transferring to Truman, which is in the same conference as Southwest Baptist. Apart from MacDougal, the team only lost two letter-winners.

The squad returns three all-conference players: LaCombe and seniors Katie Noski and Christen Belcher. The double-play combination of seniors Sherri Johnson and Kali Holleran returns as the team captains.

The strength of the team will come from the seven seniors who have a combined 15 letters. The team was in transition last season with only two seniors and one freshman. Now, the team is both young and experienced with seven seniors and four freshmen.

"Experience is huge," LaCombe said. "No matter how talented you are when you come out on a team, no matter how good of a summer or what team you played on, I really think it's just different here at college ball, and experience is huge. I grew a ton as a player just having the one year of experience on the college ballfield. And another thing is that you really get used to each other."

Hitting is something the team needs to improve on. In the 2007 campaign, the team had a .267 batting average to go with a .327 slugging and .334 on-base percentage. Their opponents were at least .25 points higher in every

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Youthful 'Dogs have high hopes

BY BLAKE TOPPMEYER
Assistant Sports Editor

It's been a quarter of a century since the Truman baseball program last experienced a winning season. But most of the Bulldog roster never has been a part of one of those 25 straight losing seasons.

Dan Davis brought in 19 new faces — 18 freshmen and one junior college transfer — in his first year of recruiting after taking over as head coach prior to the 2007 season.

The newcomers will join 11 returning players from the team that finished 9-38 last season.

"It's a young team, but that's what we needed," Davis said. "We needed fresh faces. We needed guys to maybe live up our returners, to give them a little push in the right direction. Guys that have been here four years have been beat down a little bit. They could use a little pick-me-up, and I think that's what we have."

Because Truman only had 20 players on its roster last season,

the team was only one deep at most positions. This season, the youth gives Davis multiple options at each position.

"For the most part [last season], everybody knew when they were going to play, and there was no competition," Davis said. "This year, it's different. You better continue to work. Even if you feel like you've won the job, you better work your tail off because there's somebody that's standing there behind you trying to steal your job."

Despite the relative youth of most of the roster, some key veterans return from a year ago. Senior catcher Matt Over again should be a cog in the middle of the lineup.

Last season, Over was the only Bulldog to hit over .300, batting .330 with a team-high .485 slugging percentage. His .431 on-base percentage was the second-best mark by a Bulldog since 2002.

"[The key] is being patient enough to lay off stuff and wait for your pitch," Over said. "But

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Lineup Changes

The baseball team has a large slate of new faces on the roster this year. The team added 18 freshman and one junior college transfer prior to the season. This, coupled with some players from the 2007 team graduating or leaving the program, should lead to a very different lineup in 2008 from last year's lineup. Here's how last season's opening-day lineup compares with Truman's 2008 opener last Friday.

2007		2008	
1. Zach Cox	DH	1. Corey Eagen	SS
2. Keaton Jones	LF*	2. Keaton Jones	LF
3. Neil Bleish	SS	3. Jeff Davison	2B*
4. Larry Hall	1B	4. Matt Over	C
5. Jason Thomas	CF	5. Matt Herrick	3B*
6. Brian Wilkin	2B	6. Brandon Pearl	RF
7. Matt Over	C	7. Kevin Zukaitis	DH*
8. Corey Eagen	3B	8. Larry Hall	1B
9. Matt Macke	RF*	9. Kenny Swanson	CF*
Starting Pitcher: Andy Schulte		Starting Pitcher: Justin Robbins	

* Indicates freshman

Design by Antionette Bedessie/Index

Baseball drops season opener

BY JOE BARKER
Sports Editor

After spending five weeks indoors, the Bulldog baseball team was ready to go outside.

This weekend, the team was able to leave the Pershing Arena gym and step onto a baseball field to kick off the 2008 season. They were greeted by the winter chill, a soaking wet field that made even the most routine of plays a challenge and rain that canceled one of the games.

Second-year head coach Dan Davis had one word to describe the weather.

"Brutal," Davis said. "It was cold and rainy the whole time."

Battling the elements as well as playing two games against the nation's No. 2-ranked team, the Bulldogs dropped all three games in the season-opening weekend.

The team headed south to Arkadelphia, Ark., to kick off the season. The 'Dogs lost their first game Friday 12-2 to Henderson State University (Ark.).

Rain forced the cancellation of Saturday's game against Ouachita

Baptist University (Ark.). On Sunday, the teams squared off in a doubleheader with the second-ranked Tigers. The Tigers swept the double dip 5-2 and then 18-0.

Senior first baseman Larry Hall said he thought the first game was good for the team.

"I thought we really played with them and proved to ourselves and Ouachita that we have the ability to play with that caliber of teams this year," Hall said. "Our talent level is there. If we come out to play, we can play with anyone."

Davis said the team had a real chance to knock off Ouachita in the first game of the doubleheader but was doomed by a four-run fourth inning.

"We had the one inning where we let it get away from us," Davis said. "... The leadoff guy bunted down the first base line. Our pitcher comes up and flips it to first base, and it's a bang-bang play. They called him safe, and that sort of gave them a little momentum. Next thing you know, you blink your eyes, and four runs are put on the board."

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Tennis teams have national goals

BY BRENT FOSTER
Staff Reporter

There may be snow and ice on the ground outside, but that is not stopping the men's and women's tennis teams from preparing to begin another season.

The women return four letter winners from last spring's squad that finished 16-8. They will attempt to return to the NCAA Div. II Tournament for the first time since 2005.

"Our goal is the same always, which is to make it to the NCAA National Tournament, and also just to do well throughout the season as a team," senior Jennifer Salmon said.

The women will have to rely on a big year from underclassmen to reach the NCAA Tournament. The Bulldogs only have one senior on the roster and will be welcoming four freshmen to the team.

"Although we play as a team, you also play as an individual," head coach Pete Kendall said. "All these players, both the men and women, have long backgrounds in going back to when they were 10 or 12. They've been playing year-round competition since then. ... I never think of them as freshmen as far as the competitive part of it."

Kendall also said many of the players

know each other because of tennis in high school, which helps when making the adjustment to college tennis.

This season, the women will heavily rely on Salmon, who finished last season 23-11 overall and 16-7 in dual matches.

Other players expected to contribute for the Bulldogs this season are juniors Lindsay Blair and Courtney Walther. Sophomore Taylor Warden also is expected to make an impact this season.

Salmon said she will use her leadership to help out the four freshmen on the roster. Salmon said there are many different things that she can do as a senior to help the new players get adjusted.

"Just talking to them about getting used to the traveling schedule and making them feel comfortable in matches," Salmon said.

The MIAA will be tough again this season for the Bulldogs. Kendall said six of the eight teams in the conference could compete for the conference championship.

"On the women's side, out of eight teams, there are only a couple that aren't up to the level of the others," Kendall said. "So the other six right now are very competitive. I'd say Southwest Baptist women have a shot at being the best, but it's going to be a battle. Washburn has a very good team. Northwest is pretty tough.

We think we are going to be pretty good. Our conference is always pretty solid and always has teams in the national tournament."

Like the women, the men only have one senior on their roster. The men will rely on six sophomores to try to get back to the NCAA Div. II Tournament for the fourth consecutive year.

"It's a little different this year considering how young a lot of our players are," senior Cody Pusateri said. "I'm the only graduating senior. Everyone else is a sophomore or freshman. Our conference got a lot tougher, so it will be a bigger task this year, I think more than others, to try and make sure we make it to the national tournament."

The men are led by sophomores Peter Bracha and Kyle Schlotz. Schlotz led the team with 25 victories and finished 15-3 in dual matches. Bracha finished last season 21-10 overall and 13-6 in duals.

Bracha, however, missed the season opener last week due to a wrist injury. He is expected to return for the next match against Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville.

Coach Kendall said every team in the MIAA will be tough competition on the men's side.

"I think Southwest Baptist will be the best team in the conference on the men's side this year," Kendall said. "However, everybody else is good, so it's always very tough. Emporia State was for a while at the bottom of the five, but they have picked it up the last couple years, so that's a very difficult match, too."



Brian O'Shaughnessy/Index Senior Cody Pusateri returns a serve in practice on Tuesday. The tennis teams have national aspirations in 2008.