

Bulldogs fall to ESU

Hornets limit 'Dogs' top scorers to 13 total points

BY BLAKE TOPPMEYER
Assistant Sports Editor

When the men's basketball team and Emporia State University face off, fans almost always can expect to see a game that comes down to the final few minutes.

Last night was no exception as the Hornets topped the Bulldogs 67-57. This marked the ninth time in the last 11 contests that a game between Truman and Emporia State was decided by 10 points or less.

The Hornets led by just five points with less than two minutes to play, but DeAndre Townsend rebounded a missed Emporia State three-point attempt and converted the offensive rebound into two points. The Bulldogs never could close the gap.

Truman (3-11, 2-3) held the Hornets, the MIAA's No. 1 scoring team entering the game, to 17 points below its season average but couldn't generate enough of its own offense for a victory.

The teams seemed to be heading in opposite directions prior to the game. Emporia State had lost five of its last six games, while the Bulldogs had won two straight. But head coach Jack Schrader said the Hornets' (7-7, 2-3) recent struggles are not indicative of the team's talent.

"Starting out, ... we were the team that was on the outside looking in with our record," Schrader said Monday. "So why would I look at them any differently? Their record means zero. They have as much

back as anybody. And they went to the national tournament last year."

Emporia State limited Truman's top two leading scorers, junior guard Banks Estridge and senior forward Nick Certa, to just 13 points combined. The two entered the game with a combined average of more than 28 points per game.

With Estridge and Certa struggling offensively, freshman guard Alex Henderson and junior forward Patrick Fandja bore the offensive burden.

Henderson led the Bulldogs with 14 points and Fandja had 11 points and 12 rebounds. Wednesday was just the second time this season that Estridge or Certa did not at least tie for the team lead in scoring.

Although Estridge scored just eight points, he did limit the Hornets' Townsend to 15 points. Townsend, a 5-foot-8 senior guard, entered Wednesday as the MIAA's leading scorer, averaging more than 20 points per game.

"Even though he's little, he's strong," Estridge said Monday. "And he runs the court, gets up and down lightning fast. ... He's just one of those guys you have to just kind of contain and make other people hit shots."

Wednesday marked the sixth consecutive game in which Truman's opponent scored less than 70 points. In conference games this season, the 'Dogs are sur-rendering an average of just more than 60 points per game.

The Hornets made just 36 percent of their field goal attempts Wednesday.

"We tend to keep teams under their scoring [averages]," Certa said Monday.



Mark Hardy/Index

Junior forward Patrick Fandja elevates for a power layup during the Bulldogs' 73-65 win against Missouri Western State University on Saturday. Fandja had a double-double last night at Emporia State, but the Bulldogs lost 67-57.

"That's kind of the defense we take pride in."

But even with its stingy defense, Truman couldn't overcome 21 turnovers, which Emporia State converted into 23 points, and 3-12 and 2-9 shooting performances by Estridge and Certa, respectively.

With their two offensive starts struggling in the first half, the 'Dogs remained close with a balanced scoring attack from

their freshmen, Fandja and bench players. Nine Bulldogs scored in the first 20 minutes.

Estridge said Monday that the team's entire roster is starting to get comfortable on the floor.

"People are falling into their roles and the younger guys are stepping up and realizing, 'Hey, we really are going to have to contribute this year and not wait until [we] get over,'" Estridge

said. "It's going to have to come from them now."

This balanced production — along with the Hornets' 4-for-12 free-throw shooting in the first half — helped Truman enter the locker room down just 26-25.

Truman will be in action next at Washburn University on Saturday. The Bulldogs and Ichabods (10-4, 2-3) split in their two matchups last season.

Bulldogs improve in MIAA play

BY BLAKE TOPPMEYER
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The men's basketball team was mired in a four-game losing streak when nationally ranked Pittsburg State University entered Pershing Arena on Jan. 5. So when the Gorillas established a nine-point lead late in the first half, it appeared the Bulldogs were all set for their fifth consecutive double-digit defeat.

But a different Truman team returned from the locker room after halftime and put together a strong effort to force the game into overtime.

"We came out, and we played hungry," senior forward Nick Certa said. "We played with confidence, and we came out with some fire. That's the first game we really showed that. ... That was really a turning point for sure."

Although the Gorillas eventually won the game by three points, the close defeat proved to be a spark for the Bulldogs. In their next two games, the 'Dogs (3-11) beat Fort Hays State University and Missouri Western State University. The victory against Fort Hays marked Truman's first win since Dec. 8 and first victory against a Div. II opponent.

After battling injuries, inexperience and a tough schedule in the non-conference part of the season, the Bulldogs now have almost their entire roster healthy and are 2-3 in MIAA play.

Truman exhibited improvement on both ends of the court once it entered the conference slate. The Bulldogs are holding MIAA

opponents to about 3 1/2 fewer points a game compared to non-conference opponents, while the 'Dogs have increased their scoring production by about 2 1/2 points a game in conference play.

Junior guard Banks Estridge said players are getting more comfortable with their roles in the offense, which has led to better production. Head coach Jack Schrader has started to play Certa consistently at the power forward position and freshman Ethan Freeman at the small forward spot last season.

"[Coach] has moved Ethan more out to the wing some and Certa more inside to kind of create matchup problems," Estridge said. "And I think people are just understanding their roles and understanding how to use our offense."

Several freshmen are contributing key minutes. Freeman and freshman guards Alex Henderson and Stefan Garrison all are averaging more than 12 minutes per game, and Freeman has started nine straight games.

"Henderson and Garrison have come in and provided a spark for us off the bench," Schrader said. "Freeman has been way too composed and mature as a freshman out there."

As the freshmen gain experience, their production continues to improve. Freeman scored 13 points and grabbed eight rebounds in the 'Dogs' 73-65 win against Missouri Western. Just three days earlier, Henderson posted 12 points and led the team with four assists in

Truman's 60-48 win against Fort Hays.

"I think at the beginning of the year — especially for me, and I'm sure some of the other freshmen — [we were] just trying not to screw up," said Henderson, who is the team's top three-point shooter. "Now I think we're kind of out there playing and trying to help the team."

But even with the freshmen contributions, Certa and Estridge continue to be the main catalysts for the Bulldog offense. Certa turned up his scoring once the conference season began.

"He just hits all the big shots," Henderson said. "At the beginning of the year we went through a lot of scoring droughts. And now, when we get those, we just give the ball to [Certa]. He's coming through for us."

Certa is averaging more than 16 points per game against MIAA teams, while Estridge is scoring nearly 13 points a game against conference opponents.

But Estridge knows that if the Bulldogs' recent improvements are to persist, the team needs to continue to get production from the freshmen and other veteran players.

"We come into every game knowing that a lot of the bulk of the scoring is going to come from [me and Certa]," Estridge said. "But at the same time, we're winning games now because we have other players coming off the bench now, being more confident [and] shooting the ball well. And that's the only way we're going to win games. It's going to take more than us."

TRUMAN ATHLETICS News and Notes

Women's Basketball: Mueller sets mark

Junior forward Georgia Mueller is on her way to rewriting the Truman record books.

Mueller is averaging 21.8 points per game, which is above the record average of 21.3 set in 1981-82 by Carol Jarrard. In doing so, Mueller likely also would set the record for field goals made in a season.

But offense isn't the only side of the ball Mueller is breaking records on. Her 38 blocks this year are on pace to shatter her own record of 50 in a season.

Mueller already has broken the previous record of 107 career blocks set by Jennifer Perkins from 1998-2002 with 123 of her own. If she maintains her current pace, she could reach 200 career blocks.

Men's Basketball: Taylor rejoins team

The men's basketball team gained a little depth at the beginning of the month when junior guard Matt Taylor rejoined the roster.

Head coach Jack Schrader suspended Taylor and Travis Kern for the first semester after an incident this August. Kern transferred and is no longer with the team.

Since returning to the roster, Taylor has appeared in three games. Last season, Taylor played in 11 contests, averaging 1 1/2 points a game.

Schrader said he is glad to have Taylor back on the team.

"Taylor is back with the team, doing a good job," Schrader said. "[He] wants to play this year and has been contributing in practices and had some [game] time. It's good to have him back. He's a great teammate and a great kid."

Men's Basketball: Bulldogs battered

A couple of Bulldogs are taking on an appearance more similar to old-time hockey goalies than basketball players when they step onto the court.

Freshmen guards Stefan Garrison and Alex Henderson are wearing face masks in practices and games while they recover from injuries. Henderson has a broken nose, and Garrison has a broken cheek bone.

"We're the masked bandits," Henderson said.

Henderson has appeared in 13 games this year, and Garrison has played in 12. Henderson is making 41.7 percent of his three-point attempts and is a perfect 10-for-10 from the free-throw line.

Head coach Jack Schrader said the two will wear the face masks for the rest of the season.

"It's something you have to get used to," Henderson said. "As soon as I can take it off, I'm taking it off. But it's better than sitting on the sidelines in street clothes."

Injuries have hampered the Bulldogs throughout the season. Freshman center Vesko Filchev continues to battle back from a foot injury. Because of the injury, Filchev has appeared in just five games this season.

Wrestling: Keller surpasses 70 wins

As he heads toward the end of his career, senior Dan Keller leads all active Bulldog wrestlers in career wins. Keller has 71 career victories, but is followed closely by junior Blake Peterson, who has 70 career wins.

Keller, who tore his ACL and missed most of last season, was a national qualifier in 2005. Peterson was a national qualifier in 2006 and 2007 and was also an All-American in 2007. The career leader in Bulldog wins is Mike Duffy, who had 122 wins from 1976-80.

Swimming: McCall swims new event

Head swimming coach Mark Gole has asked sophomore Andrew McCall, one of the five current national qualifiers for the men's swim team, to step into a new role.

McCall competed in the 200-yard freestyle at last Saturday's dual meet against the University of South Dakota. It was the first time he had swum the event all season. He usually only swims the 50- and 100-yard freestyle events and participates in short distance freestyle relays.

Gole said the reason for the change is to prepare McCall for possibly competing in the 800-yard freestyle relay at nationals. Gole said McCall will swim the event at least one more time before nationals.

McCall finished first in the 200-yard freestyle against South Dakota with a time of 1:50.25, close to six seconds off the national B cut time.

Golf: Two recruits sign with Bulldogs

The women's golf team has inked a pair of recruits for next season. Jessica Schepker and Liz Lestman will hit the links for the Bulldogs in 2008.

Schepker, a student at Helias High School, finished 12th in the 2007 Class 2 Missouri State High School Activities Association championship. Her team finished third in the state championship.

Lestmann competed for Nerinx Hall High School, which finished sixth in the state for Class 2. Lestmann finished five places behind Schepker in the state meet.

The Truman women qualified for the NCAA tournament last spring.

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