

Hockey returns from two months off

BY JOE BARKER
Sports Editor

The last time the Truman roller hockey club played a meaningful game, the players were gearing up to head home for Thanksgiving.

When the team takes the floor Saturday to take on Missouri State University, it will be two months to the day that the team last played in NCRHA action.

Senior forward and captain Dane Moody isn't too worried about the layoff. He said the tight-knit team will have an advantage coming back.

"It's going to be interesting to see how we adjust," Moody said. "... Basically we've been togeth-

er for three years. So there's that chemistry there that we know the other teams we are playing against don't have."

Head coach Joe Nedelec said that before the two-month hiatus the Bulldogs were playing the best hockey he had ever seen them play during his stint as coach. Nedelec said the prolonged absence will have an impact on the team but that he doesn't think it will take long to knock the rust off.

"Just based on what we experienced last year, I saw that the guys played periodically over the break — I know that a couple of them played ice hockey and a number of the boys got together and played some roller hockey,"

he said. "But by no means are these guys in the shape they were when we broke. But last year within two weeks we were back to where we had been."

With most of the players just coming back this week for practice, the team hasn't had much time to get back into game shape in time for this weekend's games.

"You can't go from out of shape to game shape in one week, but you can certainly work the muscles," Moody said.

Nedelec didn't assign the players any type of workout regimen during the time off. He left it up to the players to decide how much work they wanted to do.

The 5-0-1 Bulldogs first action will be a rematch against

Missouri State. Truman opened the season tying the Bears 5-5. The draw is the lone blemish on either team's record.

"Our first game was a chance to make a statement and we didn't do it," Moody said. "We need to do it this time around."

Junior goaltender John Pecher surrendered a season-high five against the Bears. In the next five games, Pecher only has allowed two pucks to slip past his pads for goals.

Pecher said he doesn't want to think too much about showing Missouri State that he can stop them — he does have extra inspiration to play better.

"There's definitely a little extra motivation for that one,"

Pecher said. "The big thing is to not get scared about it — not to get over-psyched about it. You don't want to psyche yourself out. You want to treat it like any other game."

Pecher should have some help keeping the Bears off the score sheet with the return of junior forward Jon Watson. Watson, who spent last fall studying abroad in Australia, will rejoin the team this weekend.

Nedelec said Watson is one of the more defensive-minded forwards who will provide help immediately.

"He's a huge help because of the experience that he has — he's played two years now," Nedelec said. "He's one of our hard-work-

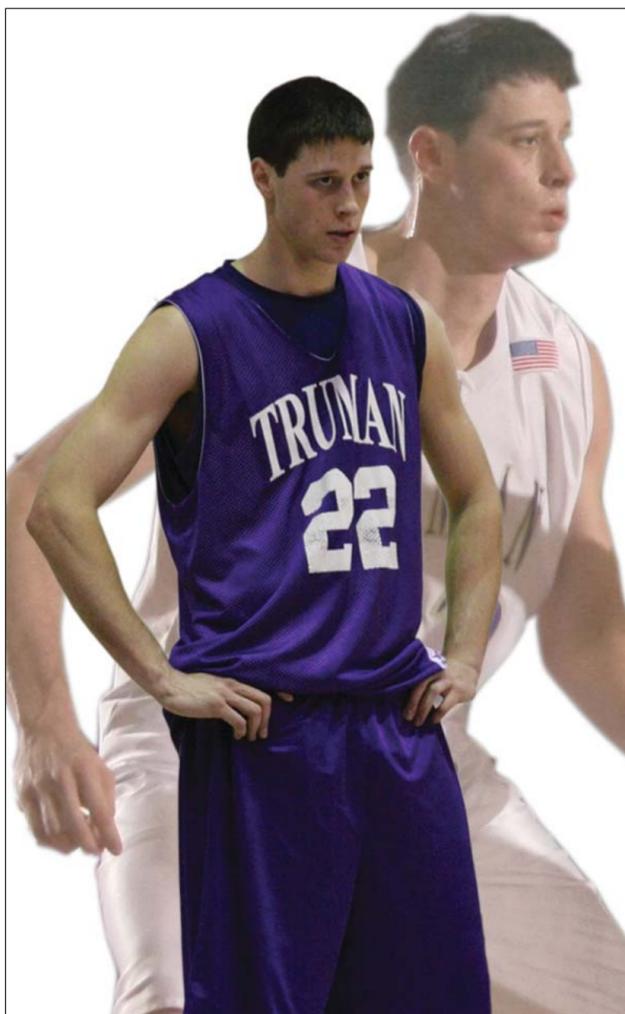
ing, effort guys. He's a digger — he gets down in the boards."

With Watson coming back, Nedelec is going to reshuffle some of the lines to see what combinations work best.

"That's actually what this weekend is going to be about," he said. "I'm going to see where guys are fitting and how things are going."

Nedelec said he is in an interesting position because he has so much skill on the roster to move around.

"As a coach, I'm so fortunate to have a team so talented that I can wonder what kinds of lines I want and not worry about if we're going to win a game," he said.



Photos and design by Mark Hardy/Index

Certa helps 'Dogs earn MIAA wins

BY NATHAN BECKER
Editor In Chief

Nick Certa's individual performances lately carry enough weight to tip the scales in the Bulldogs' favor.

The senior forward exploded for 24 points against Missouri Western State University on Saturday and put up 15 points at Fort Hays State University on Jan. 9.

But for Certa, flashy capers on the floor don't make a difference — he and the Bulldogs have one goal:

"Win," he said after Monday's practice. "It doesn't matter [how]. I don't care — there are some sloppy games, but a win's a win. ... We do like to make sure we play and do things right. ... We had a rough start, but we're getting pretty excited. I love to win, and hopefully we get to do it a lot this year."

Certa was 8-for-8 from the free-throw line in the Bulldogs' previous two games, and he has missed only two free throws all season, draining 21 of 23. His free-throw shooting sits at 91 percent this season, up from 74 percent last season.

"You have a tendency in the middle of the game — you're so tired, you let your form slip a little bit," Certa said. "I'm just trying to make sure to take a deep breath and follow the same form every time."

Certa has led the team in points the last five games, and he has either led or tied for the team lead in scoring in 10 of the team's 13 games.

"It's always been in our offense," Certa said. "It's nothing out of the ordi-

nary. Our offense just kind of flows, and whoever has the shot takes it."

Certa attributed his points against Missouri Western to high-quality play from the rest of the Bulldogs.

"Some days [shots] fall, some days they don't, and I was able to get open," Certa said. "A lot of great screens by guys on our team — our offense is really coming together."

Junior point guard Banks Estridge said Certa is a valuable weapon for the Bulldogs.

"He has the ability to quiet the other team or the other team's crowd by just doing what he does," Estridge said. "He can shoot from anywhere with anyone on him, so I think that helps our team, knowing we've got someone who pretty much is automatic from anywhere on the floor. When you know you've got that, you step onto the floor a little more confident."

Certa, the team's lone senior starter, has had to assume more leadership after last year's senior class of Austin Kirby, Grant Agbo, Garret Grimm and Andy Calmes graduated.

"I knew last year I kind of had to step up because I knew I was going to have to be a leader this year," Certa said. "So I tried to help out our seniors last year. You have a lot to learn from guys like that. They're good leaders."

And with Calmes and Agbo — the team's two starting big men — gone, Certa has adjusted to playing more in the post than on the perimeter.

"It really doesn't matter to me at all," Certa said. "Whatever's going to help us win is what I want to do."

Athlete of the Week

Nick Certa

Sport: Basketball

Year: Senior

Position: Forward

Hometown: Godfrey, Ill.

Nick Certa torched the nets for 24 points Saturday in the Bulldogs' 73-65 victory against Missouri Western. The senior forward, who was named the MIAA men's basketball player of the week, is averaging more than 15 points per game this season. He also has made 43 percent of his three-point shots.

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