

CURRIER | Bulldog football coach has guided team to two straight winning seasons and has a 16-28 record after taking over the team in 2004

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"I'm just being as upfront and honest and as professional as I can be," he said. "That's how we do business. It is part of the business, and it can be a distraction. But I think, based on how we're handling it, I've been honest with a couple of recruits and I think it's helped us some. I've been honest with our team. I told our team before anybody else [could] find out. I'm not trying to do anything behind anyone's back."

Wollmering said he was not surprised when Currier told him that he

had sent in his application.

"A lot of times when you hire people, and you know where they're from and positions open up in that area — I can understand the reasons," Wollmering said.

Wollmering said he was never contacted by the Mavericks for permission to talk to Currier, something that is not required by NCAA regulations.

"Usually it's professional courtesy, especially in head coach situations, but there is no NCAA rule saying they have to get permission to

talk with a coach," he said.

Wollmering said he has not started looking for replacements because Currier very likely could be back next season. He does, however, have a list of potential candidates in mind.

"I've always tried to keep some names that could be some potential candidates for a head coaching job if I'm in a position of looking for one," Wollmering said. "I think it's always something to keep, because you never know."

The timing of the interview is right

in the middle of the recruiting season. Wollmering said he hopes to have the situation resolved by National Signing Day on Feb. 6 — hopefully with Currier still a Bulldog.

"Obviously I want him to stay," he said.

Wollmering's sentiments were echoed by Bulldog junior linebacker Jason Thier.

"I know that coaches move around, but obviously the team would like him to stay here so we can continue to prog-

ress like we have," Thier said. "If he does move on, I wish him the best."

Thier said the team has talked about the potential for Currier to leave but hasn't begun preparing for a new head coach.

"Right now we're just kind of sitting back and waiting to see what happens," Thier said.

Currier is 16-28 in four seasons as head coach of the Bulldogs. Prior to taking over the Bulldogs he was 32-12 at Concordia State University-St. Paul.

FANDJA | Junior is averaging eight points and eight rebounds a game this season

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High School in Iowa.

Fandja did not know anybody in the United States when he arrived, but he said the Macke family eased his transition.

"There was supposed to be a lot [of difficulties]," Fandja said. "But I was really, really fortunate and lucky to be around people, just awesome, like Betty and Mark Macke, my host family. I can't describe it."

In addition to the Macke family, the basketball team helped Fandja get comfortable in a new country. Fandja joined the team as a junior in January 2004 immediately after he arrived at Marshalltown.

"He had somewhat of a language barrier," said Dr. Mark Macke, who learned about Fandja's situation from a friend. "He could speak English, but it was like he had taken a couple years of it in high school, kind of as a second language. ... But the kids in town were very helpful. The kids on the basketball team were good kids."

One of Fandja's teammates at Marshalltown was Matt Taylor, who is now a junior and Fandja's teammate at Truman. Taylor said that when Fandja first arrived, it was clear that he didn't have much experience playing organized basketball. But there was no denying his athletic ability.

"The first time he walked in, junior year, we were shooting around — we had a game and it was just a little shoot-around before the tip-off," Taylor said. "He talked with the coaches, and all of a sudden, he's throwing down jams. And we were like, 'Who is this kid? Where did he come from?'"

Because he joined the team in the

middle of the year, Fandja only competed on the practice squad during his first year at Marshalltown. Then he and Taylor reported the summer prior to their senior year at the local YMCA, playing basketball and working on conditioning. The work paid off.

Fandja averaged more than 12 points and nearly 10 rebounds per game his senior year and drew interest from Div. I schools, such as the University of San Francisco, the University of Wisconsin and the University of Illinois. Schrader said he also pursued Fandja.

Eventually, Fandja elected to stay in Iowa and attended Marshalltown Community College for a year. But after just one year at the junior college, Schrader started calling again. This time, Fandja listened.

"With other coaches, it would be basketball first," Fandja said. "With Coach Schrader, it was always school first. ... I liked talking to him because I was really impressed because every time he'd be talking about education."

That education appeal ultimately led Fandja, who is majoring in accounting and finance, to Truman and the Bulldogs in fall 2006.

But with a veteran-laden team last season, Fandja experienced little playing time and averaged about two points and two rebounds a game. Still, Fandja said he learned from then-senior forward Andy Calmes and gained an understanding of the offense.

This year, Fandja's production has taken off, and he is averaging more than 25 minutes per game — fourth highest on the team. Helped by a 7-foot-1 wingspan — a half inch longer than freshman center David Scott, who is

five inches taller than Fandja — he also defends well in the post.

Nevertheless, Fandja has not forgotten his No. 1 priority: education. He is searching for a summer internship as he prepares for his senior year at Truman and has an interview lined up with Ernst and Young, a major global accounting company.

"He's making his life successful here through his efforts," Schrader said. "I'm happy because everything we say about this University is demonstrated with him. He's become part of the team. He's become part of the University. And this is a place where we sell to you that you're not just a number. I think he sees that, and he's using it for all it's worth."

Fandja never has returned to Cameroon since arriving in the United States more than four years ago. During the holidays, Fandja stays with the Macke family, who still attend some of his games.

Under the terms of his visa, if Fandja returned to Cameroon to visit, he would have to re-apply for a visa to get back to the United States. This, plus the expense of the trip, has limited Fandja's contact with his mother and sister, who still are in Cameroon, to phone calls about once a week.

But largely because of his work ethic — whether it's staying at Pershing after practice to shoot free throws or dedicating extra time to his studies — Fandja is making the most of his opportunity in the United States.

"Everything I'm doing, I'm going to try to do the best that I can, to be the best I can and try to have as [little] weakness as I can," Fandja said.



Mark Hardy/Index
Junior forward Patrick Fandja posts up against Missouri Western's Jay McFarland earlier this season. Fandja is averaging eight points a game.

LOSS | Bearcats use nine three-pointers to hand 'Dogs 13th loss

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"They really got physical with us, and I don't think we responded to that very well," freshman forward Ethan Freeman said. "... When they started to speed things up, I think things got a little hectic, and we didn't respond well enough to that."

The loss at Washburn was the second game in a row in which the Bulldogs failed to protect a late lead. Against Emporia State University on Jan. 16, the 'Dogs led late in the game but the Hornets outscored Truman by seven points in the final five minutes and claimed a win.

Prior to these two games, the Bulldogs had been outscoring their opposition by an average of more than 2 1/2 points per game in the last five minutes of regulation.

But the Ichabods forced four Truman turnovers in the final five minutes to spur their late run. The Bulldogs turned the ball over 17 times in the game — compared to Washburn's 10 turnovers — and are last in the MIAA in turnover margin and assist-to-turnover ratio.

"The No. 1 thing that has influenced us has been our turnovers," Schrader said. "I think we turned it over [Saturday] in somewhat of a soft manner. You can have aggressive turnovers, or you can have soft turnovers that convert to easy baskets for them."



Mark Hardy/Index
Junior guard Banks Estridge gets pressured by a Missouri Western defender earlier this season. The Bulldogs lost Wednesday and have dropped eight of their last 10 games.

Freeman led the way for the Bulldogs offensively with 14 points, 11 of which came in the first half. Freeman's performance and the play of the Bulldog defense were the key factors in Truman leading 25-24 at halftime.

Washburn entered the contest averaging 90 points per game at

home, but for the fifth time this season, Truman held its opponent to fewer than 60 points.

Schrader said, for the most part, the Bulldogs were able to limit Washburn's fastbreak opportunities.

"We didn't give them easy baskets in transition — except

when we turned it over," Schrader said. "And when we turned it over, they got layups."

Truman will next take the court Saturday when Southwest Baptist University (13-3, 6-1) comes to Pershing Arena. The Bearcats currently are atop the MIAA standings.

JINX | Recent games reveal cursed nature

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I was starting to get a little worried. After last week, I am certain I am cursed.

It started Jan. 13. I was making plans for the upcoming Index issue. I decided I was going to write a column about how the women's basketball team was on a roll. They had been playing really well and were surpassing most people's expectations.

The roll promptly stopped. Mere hours after I finished my column saying how they had turned things around, they lost last Wednesday night to Emporia State University 98-61.

The women then experienced another loss Saturday to Washburn University.

My column cost the women two games.

Sure, the teams they played are in the upper tier of the MIAA, but I blame myself. Had I not pointed out that the team was playing well, the games probably would have been closer.

But that was not all the damage I had wrought.

That Sunday, I decided to name Nick Certa the Athlete of the Week. Certa had been on fire. It was a risk choosing Certa because he was playing a game the night before publication and could have a bad game.

"No chance," I said to anyone who would listen. There is no way Certa would not keep up his stats against Emporia. The

junior forward had been averaging a little more than 15 points a game entering the contest with the Hornets. I was sure he would score that much, if not more — I even said as much.

He scored five points. I am sorry, Nick.

The streak of ineptitude continued this weekend. The New England Patriots continued their march toward an undefeated season despite my wishes that they would just go away. I even tried to anti-jinx them — I kept saying how good they were and how they couldn't be stopped.

But the sports gods were far too smart and knew that deep down I hate the Patriots.

I'm not trying to take too much credit here, but trends can not be ignored.

However, things might be turning the corner. Late Sunday the New York Giants pulled off a victory against the Brett Favre-led Green Bay Packers. I hate Favre and the Packers, so I was pulling pretty hard for the Giants.

After two chances to win failed, I thought my jinx was holding strong. But then, New York kicker Lawrence Tynes nailed a 47-yarder through the uprights to win the game in overtime.

Maybe the jinx is over, maybe not. We will all find out Super Sunday. If the Patriots garner win No. 19, I am sorry to the world. If the Giants can pull off the upset, well, I'm back baby.

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Dr. Whitlock and Cindy have two children, Jeremy and Cassandra, and two grandchildren, Hannah and Emma.

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