Cross Country to compete in Regionals

BY JACK NICHOLL
Staff Reporter

The South Central Regional meet this Saturday will close out the season for most of the runners on Truman's cross country teams.

For a team to advance past the regional meet in Joplin, Mo., it must finish in the top two of 20 teams in the meet. An individual can advance by finishing in the top five overall or finishing in the top two runners who aren't in the top two teams.

Only two runners, juniors Grace DelNero and Danna Kelly, have a chance at making it past regional and reaching the NCAA championship which also will be in Joplin. Kelly has improved in the race the last two years, finishing 19th in 2005 and 11th in 2006. DelNero finished 29th in '04 and 33rd in '05.

"I'm just going to try to go out and have the best race of my season, whether that is Saturday or two weeks from Saturday [at the NCAA championship]," Kelly said. "I'm just going to go out with everything I have and not look back and have any regrets."

Women's head coach John Cochrane said he would like to see both Kelly and DelNero finish in the top 15, which would make them All-Regional. He said he would like the entire team to perform better than it has all season.

"What will happen with a lot [of] teams is that after their conference meets cross country doesn't become that important," Cochrane said. "We try pretty hard every year to make sure that we get better, whether our teams are going to be close to qualifying for nationals or not. If you do that, you finish a whole lot better in the regional than you think you can."

On the men's side, head coach Tim Schwegler said he would like the team to finish in the top 10. He said the team has been favored to finish in the top 10 at the beginning of the season but it has since dropped out, and the members would like to get back to their previous ranking. He said this course is speed-oriented compared with the strength-oriented course the team ran at conference. There isn't much strategy, except starting out fast and keeping a good pace, he said.

The teams have run the course before at the Southern Stampede on Sept. 12, where the women finished 11th and the men finished 24th out of 37 teams. But Schwegler said the regional meet will include more competitive teams. The meet is composed of close to 20 teams from the MIAA, Lonestar and Heartland conferences.

At the Stampede, Kelly finished 14th and DelNero finished 25th. Freshman Josh Mantooth and junior Bryant England were the top two men's finishers, placing 107th and 111th, respectively.

Kelly said she and DelNero both are capable of making it past regionals and that it will come down to who does well with tapering this week. Regional is the second race in a row for which teams will taper to try to improve their times.

"Tapering definitely has a different effect on different people," Kelly said. "I've found in my past two years as a collegiate athlete, I've had a better race for regionals than I have for conference."

Both squads will send their entire teams to regional this year, compared to past years when they haven't sent every runner. Cochrane said that last year, keeping most of the team at home was better for the three runners who did go. This year, he said, sending the entire team is more beneficial to everyone.

Kelly said having the whole team at conference is a boost.

"No matter which girl I think about on the team, each of them plays a huge role, just giving the team motivation or their own type of leadership," Kelly said. "I think it would be a loss to only take a couple people to regionals this year because we are a close team, and mentally and physically we work really well together."

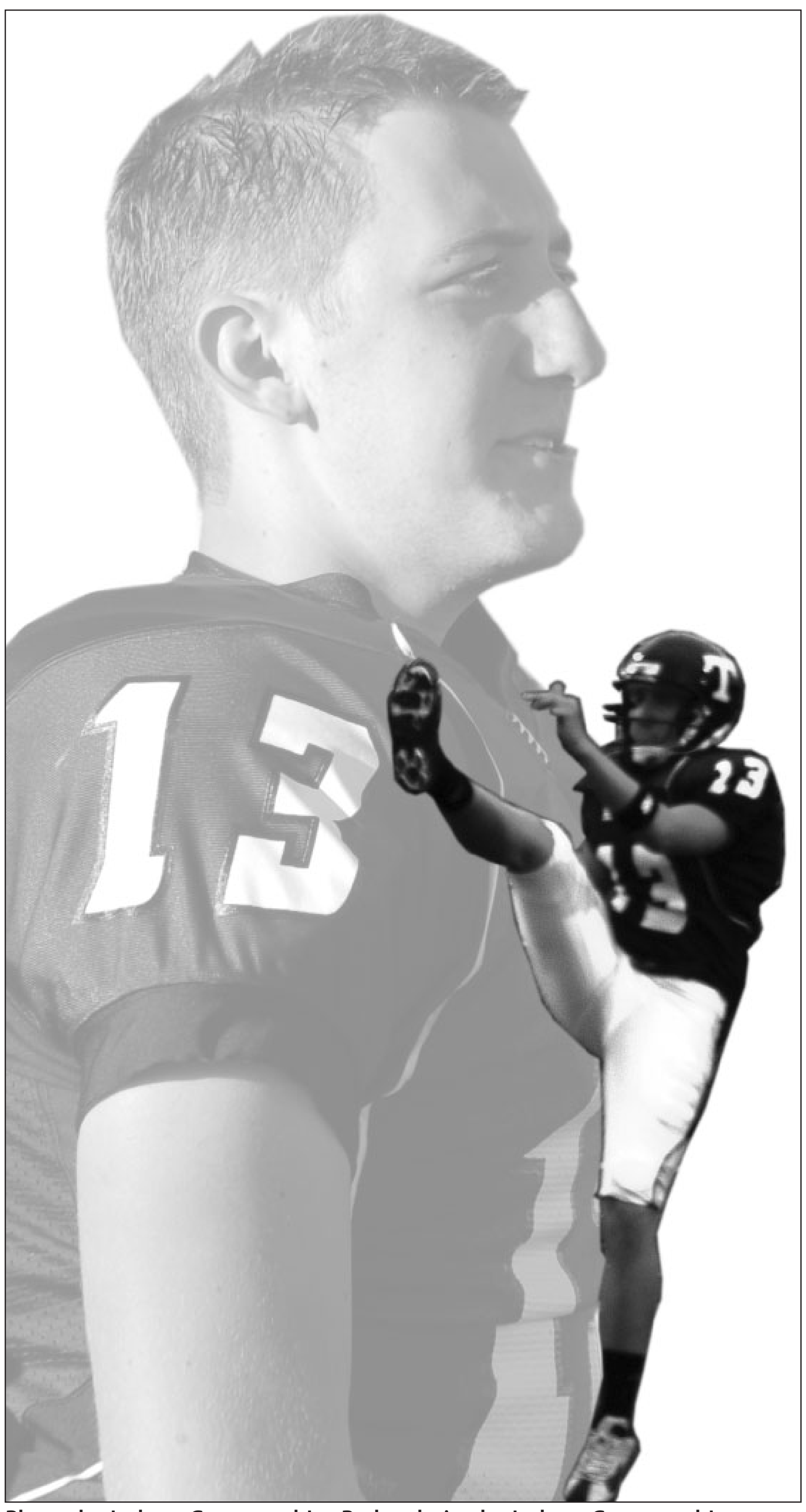
The course was only an 8K for the men and a 6K for the women earlier this year at the Stampede. This time the race has been lengthened to 10K for the men and remains at 6K for the women. Schwegler said the added distance should have little effect on the race except for possibly a minor effect on younger runners.

Schwegler said he wants to finish the season on a high note.

"Seniors don't want to finish their last cross country race on a bad note, and then the other guys don't want to think about it for nine months," Schwegler said.

Jackson Groves/Index

The men's cross country squad trains during practice earlier this fall. The men and women will compete in the South Central Regional meets Saturday in Joplin, Mo.



Photos by Jackson Groves and Joe Barker design by Jackson Groves and Jason Williams/Index

Masucci's leg gives team overtime win

BY BLAKE TOPPMEYER
Assistant Sports Editor

Mickey Masucci received football's version of a mulligan.

After missing a field goal in a tie game near the end of regulation Saturday, the sophomore kicker obtained a second chance at the game-winning field goal in overtime.

This time, the kick soared high between the uprights to give the Truman football team a 33-30 Homecoming victory against Emporia State University and sending the Bulldogs into celebration, with Masucci in the middle of it.

"The one that I missed, I tried to knock it out of my head," Masucci said. "And then I just try to keep my faith in my holder and my snapper and my line guys. They do a great job for me."

Masucci's overtime field goal traveled a distance of 32 yards, much shorter than his attempt from 44 yards which sailed wide left with 18 seconds remaining in regulation.

Junior quarterback Matt Ticich said he knew the offense — which received possession after the 'Dogs' defense shut down the Hornets on their offensive try — didn't need a touchdown but just had to gain some yards to put Masucci in good position to knock home the game-winner.

"I knew if we got inside the 20-yard line, he was money," Ticich said. "He's practically 100 percent inside the 20. We knew we didn't have to get a first down. We just had to get a couple yards for him, get inside the 20, and he would finish it for us."

The offense gained nine yards to Emporia's 16-yard line before head coach Shannon Currier sent the field goal unit on the field instead of going for a first down on fourth and one.

"I was real confident because I know he's a good kicker," Currier said. "He did a great job for us putting up points today. ... We're excited about having him for a couple more years."

For Masucci, the 32-yarder marked his fourth successful field goal of the day with just one miss. In the third quarter, he converted two kicks from 26 yards and another from 38 yards to keep the Bulldogs within striking distance.

Masucci is eight for 11 in field goal attempts this season, including a seven-for-eight clip inside 40 yards.

All four of Masucci's field goals Saturday came while he was kicking toward the east end of the field, with the only miss coming at the west end.

"During practice all week, I practiced on [the east] end of the field because the wind was actually going the opposite way all week so I was trying to get some practice into the wind," Masucci said.

Masucci's overtime field goal came after Emporia's Johnny Torres missed a 41-yard attempt on the Hornets' overtime possession. It was Torres' third failed attempt of the afternoon. Including extra points, Masucci totaled 13 points, while Torres chipped in just four points for Emporia.

Masucci's presence also was vital in the kickoff department. After the Bulldogs scored to tie the game at 30-30 with 2:47 remaining, Masucci booted his kickoff to the five yard line where it bounced into the end zone for a touchback. It was Masucci's second touchback of the game and handed the Hornets poor starting field position for their final drive of regulation.

And then Masucci made his biggest contribution of the day in overtime with the game riding on his right foot.

"I was just thinking, 'Do what I did on those previous three field goals down there,'" Masucci said. "The shot at the first game winner was nerve racking enough, so the second one wasn't too bad."

Athlete of the Week

Mickey Masucci
Sport: Football
Year: Sophomore
Position: Kicker
Hometown: Wildwood, Mo.

Mickey Masucci lifted the football team to a Homecoming victory Saturday with his 32-yard field goal in overtime. The kick was Masucci's fourth successful field goal attempt of the game. He also tallied two touchbacks on kickoffs. Masucci's efforts earned him the MIAA Special Teams Player of the Week honor.

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