

## Athlete of the Week

### Vanness Emokpae

**Sport:** Football  
**Year:** Sophomore  
**Position:** Wide Receiver  
**Hometown:** Houston, Texas

Vanness Emokpae helped the Bulldogs upset Missouri Western State University 37-28 in the season finale. The second-year wide out hauled in six passes for 81 yards. Two of the catches were for touchdowns that helped the 'Dogs come back from an early 14-0 deficit. Emokpae finished the season with 35 catches and four

# Emokpae's TDs lead to upset win

BY JACK NICHOLL  
Staff Reporter

Sophomore wide receiver Vanness Emokpae's second touchdown might have been the play that propelled the football team to a win last Saturday against Missouri Western State University.

The touchdown, which occurred with 38 seconds left in the first half, started a string of 23 unanswered points for the Bulldogs, who ended up winning 37-28 at Stokes Stadium to finish 6-5 on the season.

"He just made a fabulous diving catch," head coach Shannon Currier said. "Looking at the tape, I know I saw how far he had to dive out there, and that was definitely a quality catch."

The play had Emokpae lined up in the inside receiver position, matching him with the opposing safety. Emokpae ran a fade route to the outside and broke free of the defender. There was one problem: The pass from junior quarterback Matt Ticich was slightly too far, forcing a diving catch.

"It was a little tough, I'm not going to lie," Emokpae said. "I took off, and I was like, 'Man, I'm not going to get it,' and then it just kind of fell into my hands, and I tried to cradle it. It was a good throw, too — I give Matt a lot of credit."

The first touchdown was easier, at least from Emokpae's standpoint. Ticich, after being forced out of the pocket, found Emokpae downfield for the score. No dive was needed on this catch, which occurred near the start of the second quarter and cut

Missouri Western's lead in half.

"The [defensive backs] weren't respecting me all day ... so I ran past them and looked back, and Matt had already put the ball in the air, and it was up to me to catch it," Emokpae said.

Emokpae finished the game with six receptions for 81 yards, both team highs. He said that overhearing Missouri Western talk trash before the game helped him become motivated. He said the Griffons viewed Truman as lightweights because of the difference in record.

"I know I take it personally," Emokpae said. "Some of my best games are when people are talking trash during warm-ups, so that helps me rise to the occasion."

Saturday hasn't been Emokpae's only big game of the season. In Ticich's record-breaking game against Upper Iowa on Sept. 8, Emokpae had seven receptions and 170 yards — both team highs. He was also Truman's leading receiver on the season with 462 yards.

Currier gave Emokpae high accolades, saying he has good size, speed and strength. He said Emokpae will fit well into the spread offensive attack again next season with most of the offensive players will be returning. Currier said it's very difficult for teams to focus on Emokpae in multiple-receiver sets.

"[This] year was his second year playing receiver, and that's what's exciting about him is that he's got a lot more potential to get to," Currier said. "As he pushes himself to where he hasn't been yet, he's going to see some major results in the next couple years."



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

## TITLE | Volleyball defeats Pitt. State 3-1 in MIAA championship, enters NCAAs at 34-5

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The MIAA title, combined with Washburn's semifinal tournament loss to Pitt State means Truman will be the No. 1 seed in the South Central Region and will host the regional portion of the tournament beginning Thursday afternoon at Pershing Arena. Truman will play its opening-round game at 7:30 p.m. against eighth-seeded Albany State University (Ga.), the champions of the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference.

It is the Bulldogs' eighth-straight trip to the NCAA tournament and will be the third time in five years that they host regionals. Truman will be looking

to remove the ghosts of past NCAA tournaments, including last year's disappointing loss in the second round to the University of North Alabama.

Skoach said the loss to North Alabama remains close in the players' memories.

"We remind them of that," Skoach said. "We remind them, 'Don't look ahead.' We remind them of how we were up 2-0 against Washburn, not as a fear, but to remind them that it isn't over until it's over. The same token is we've come back. Pitt State was up 2-0, and they almost lost the other night. We remind them not as a bad way, but to say last year we were built to win that

title, and we didn't because along the way something happened, and we lost a little fight in us."

Medina said that heading into regionals, it is important that the Bulldogs go out and play their best against whichever team they face.

"Honestly everyone talks about how seeding is important and this and that, but I look at it that we have to go out and play our best game every single night because we are going to end up playing the best team anyway whether it be round one, two or three," Medina said. "... We definitely want to avenge our loss from last year."

## UPSET | Bulldogs mount come-from-behind victory to finish 2007 campaign at 6-5

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After the game, Currier had nothing but good things to say about his quarterback.

"He's a big-time player," Currier said. "He's definitely the best quarterback I've ever coached. ... He makes our offense tick. He's tough, he's competitive, he's smart [and] he throws the ball well. Can he get better? Definitely. ... But I think he is the best in the country. I wouldn't trade him for anybody."

Ticich's abilities were on display on Truman's first touchdown drive when the Bulldogs were faced with 3rd and 5 at the Missouri Western 25 yard line.

Ticich dropped back, eluded two oncoming Griffon defenders, and took off to his left. Spotting junior wide receiver Tyler Fenton up the field, Ticich threw a perfect strike that allowed Fenton to make an impressive sideline grab for the first down. The drive resulted in a touchdown.

Ticich said he recognizes how big this win was.

"It's a tremendous win for our program," Ticich said. "We beat a playoff-caliber team, which is something we've

wanted to do all year, and I think it's going to give us a lot of momentum in the offseason."

Currier said the win was huge because it gave the Bulldogs' a second straight winning season and shows that they are a team on the rise. He also said his players will get confidence from beating a good team like Missouri Western.

Cooper said the team was highly motivated for the game. "They were going to go to the playoffs if they won," Cooper said. "So what we said was, 'Hey, this is our playoff game.' ... And we came out, and we showed up, and we really played like we had nothing to lose — like there was no tomorrow."

With 6:13 remaining in the game, the Griffons made a quarterback change. Newhart, who had started all 10 previous games this season before injuring his shoulder, entered the game in relief of a struggling Barron Bradshaw.

But after completing his first six passes and leading the Griffons from their own 12 to the Truman 3 on Missouri Western's last drive of the game, Cooper picked off Newhart in the end zone to effectively close out the game.

## FOOTBALL | Ticich helps guide team to a second consecutive winning season

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remarkable season in which he was the lone offensive threat at times.

Ticich finished the season with 2,579 passing yards and completed 56 percent of his passes. His 25 touchdown passes were the second-most by a Bulldog quarterback in Truman football history.

"We wouldn't trade [Ticich] for anybody," Currier said. "I think he's one of the best players around. He's the most competitive player I've ever coached [and the] best quarterback I've ever coached."

The pinnacle of Ticich's season came Sept. 8, when he treated the crowd of 4,300 fans with a record-breaking night.

Ticich's 16-yard fourth-quarter strike to sophomore wide receiver Albert Coker broke the Bulldog record for passing yards in a single game. The previous mark was 479 yards, posted by Jake Czeschin in 2004, Currier's first season as head coach. Ticich finished the game with 493 passing yards, which also was good for the MIAA

single-game passing record.

And that was just the prelude to what Ticich would accomplish this season. Seven weeks after the home opener, the Bulldogs found themselves in danger of slipping below the .500 mark in their Homecoming game against Emporia State University.

Trailing 27-16 entering the fourth quarter, the Bulldogs' offense turned to the man clad in the purple No. 11 jersey to generate a comeback. Ticich responded and completed eight straight passes at one point in the fourth quarter. The Bulldogs ultimately won the game in overtime.

Ticich's play was even more imperative to the team's success because of the inconsistency of the running game, injuries to top running back senior Jake Cunningham and inexperience of the offensive line.

At times, Ticich was the running game. He led the team with 394 rushing yards and five touchdowns on the ground. Ticich's mobility also was key when he needed to move the passing

pocket when his protection broke down, as it often did.

"Right now, as he goes, we go," Currier said after Truman's Week 10 loss to Missouri Southern State University.

Defensively, the Bulldogs battled to stop the run all season long, but the problem appeared to be on its way to being corrected Saturday, when the defense limited Missouri Western to 28 points, 10 below its season average. After surrendering an average of 250 rushing yards per game in the season's first 10 games, Truman brought that number down to a respectable 166 yards against the Griffons.

"We just had something to prove [against Missouri Western]," junior defensive end Les Hammers said. "We have a good defense. We just have to step up."

And with 18 of 22 starters returning next season, the Bulldogs will try to up the ante in 2008.

"I don't think we can be satisfied with 6-5 anymore," Ticich said.

## WINS | Weekend triumphs translate to successful seasons for football and volleyball

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playing surface victoriously, my brain started to draw a parallel between the two squads. Even though one team was playing for pride and the other was playing for playoff seeding, the two wins had a lot in common.

With the wins, both teams legitimized their seasons. The wins made me ignore the rest of the season and instead focus on what I had just seen.

For the volleyball team, all season long I kept waiting for something to go wrong. The wheels seemed destined to fall off. I mean, all I kept hearing about was what the team didn't have. Surely this team was not as good as the 2006 regular season juggernaut.

So when Pittsburg State University's Sammie Williams' attack went into the net, a fifth straight MIAA Championship season changed in my eyes.

This team is really good. Better than they were given credit for in the

preseason — even the regular season, for that matter.

The Bulldogs are the fourth-ranked team in the nation and, with their win against Pitt. State, are the top seed in the tough (six of the eight teams currently reside in the top-25 in the coaches poll) South Central Regional.

This team has a chance to be better than the 2006 squad. They have a chance of making it to the Elite 8. With the way they played in the MIAA tournament — winning when they didn't play their "A" game — this team realistically should contend for a national title.

The football team won't be going after a national title this year. It won't even be going to the playoffs. But the Bulldogs are heading into the offseason with something I didn't think they would have prior to Saturday's game: a winning record.

Before Saturday, I was ready to write the season off as a disappointment with a

capital D. The team had five wins against the bottom-feeders of the MIAA and non-conference cupcakes.

Then Saturday came and the team played with heart. Even after falling behind 14-0, the purple and white didn't give up. They kept playing hard and cutting into the lead. Once they took it, they refused to let it go.

The Bulldogs won Saturday for the simple reason that they wanted it more. Missouri Western State University thought it was entitled to the win.

It didn't happen that way. With the win, it looks like the Bulldogs might have turned a corner in the development of the program. Only four players from this year's team will be out of eligibility. That means everyone else should know what it takes to beat a high-quality team.

Saturday the volleyball and football teams each won just one game, but those wins changed their whole seasons.

## 2007 South Central Regional Nov. 15 to 17 Pershing Arena

### Opening Round Games



No. 6 Central Missouri (30-6)

at 12:00 p.m.



No. 3 West Florida (32-6)



No. 7 West Georgia (27-11)

at 2:30 p.m.



No. 2 Washburn (34-3)



No. 5 Pittsburg State (28-8)

at 5:00 p.m.



No. 4 Emporia State (26-8)



No. 8 Albany State (21-14)

at 7:30 p.m.



No. 1 Truman (34-5)

Design by Joe Barker/Index

## NCAA | Volleyball team to host South Central Region for second straight year, region includes five MIAA teams

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met in the first round of the tournament, with Truman sweeping the Rams in three games.

Second-seeded Washburn, who seemed destined for the No. 1 seed until two losses in the last two weeks of the season, enters the tournament with a record of 34-3. The Lady Blues, who placed six players on the all-conference team, are led by MIAA player of the year and All-American Tessa Jones, who is third in the conference in kills per game (4.32) and points per game (4.98). This is Washburn's fifth NCAA tournament appearance, all of them coming since 2002. The Lady Blues have never advanced past the second round.

Washburn will open the tournament against the seventh-seeded University of West Georgia Wolves (27-11), who are making their first NCAA tournament appearance after receiving an automatic bid by winning the GSC tournament championship. The Wolves come into the tournament with a record of 27-11 and are led by Andressa Martins, who averages 4.19 kills per game.

The University of West Florida is the third seed and is coming off an upset loss to West Georgia last weekend in its conference championship. The Argonauts enter the tournament with a 32-6 record and already have victories against Pitt. State and Emporia. The Argonauts made it in to the tournament for the second straight season and the second time overall.

West Florida will take on the No. 6-seeded University of Central Missouri

in the opening round. This is a rematch of a second-round match from last season, which the Jennies won in five games. The Jennies (30-6), making their record 25th consecutive NCAA tournament appearance, enter the tournament having lost two of their last three, including a first-round loss in the MIAA tournament to Pitt State.

The 4-5 matchup will be the only all-MIAA match of the first round, featuring fourth-seeded Emporia State University and fifth-seeded Pitt. State.

Pitt. State (28-8) is coming off a run to the MIAA championship game where it fell in four games to Truman. The Gorillas, who are in the tournament for the fourth time in the last five seasons, will look for a little revenge against Emporia. The Gorillas are 0-2 against Emporia this season.

Emporia (28-6) is making its second trip to the tournament in the last three seasons. The Hornets are coming off a semifinal loss to Truman in the MIAA tournament.

Tournament action will begin today at noon when No. 3 West Florida battles No. 6 Central Missouri. At 2:30 p.m., No. 7 West Georgia will take on No. 2 Washburn. The nightcap will start with No. 4 Emporia against No. 5 Pitt State at 5 p.m., followed by the finale at 7:30 p.m. between top-seeded Truman and No. 8 Albany State.

The winners from Thursday's games will advance to Friday's semifinals. The championship game is set for 7:30 p.m. Saturday.