

# '07 BASKETBALL

## P R E V I E W



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## Women seek wins

**Veteran-laden team looks to improve on last year's 8-19 mark**

BY SHAWN SHINNEMAN  
Staff Reporter

The women's basketball team will call on experience to lead them back to the MIAA tournament after not qualifying for the event last season.

With a roster that includes four seniors, the Bulldogs will look to compete in a conference that has gotten the best of them lately. Truman has not had a conference record over .500 since the 1999-2000 season.

"I know we definitely want to make the conference tournament this year and hope that our record gets a little bit better," junior forward Georgia Mueller said.

But head coach John Sloop said his goals for the year are the same as always.

"The only goals we always have are we want to work hard all the time, [and] we want to try and work to get better everyday," Sloop said. "If you can do that, things will take care of themselves."

In addition to the four seniors, the most talented returning Bulldog is Mueller. After averaging 17.8 points per game and 8.6 rebounds per game last season, Mueller was selected to the All-MIAA First Team.

Mueller's presence wasn't only felt on offense. Her 50 blocks last season set a school record, flying by the old mark of 41.

However the key to the season could be providing a supporting cast to fill the

roles around Mueller.

"More people [need to] get involved on the perimeter," senior guard Candace McGee said. "Because if we make shots from [the] perimeter, then they're going to have to choose to focus on either Georgia or the shooter."

Truman shot just 30 percent from behind the arc last season.

"[Mueller] sometimes makes teams have to make adjustments," Sloop said. "Being able to knock down some perimeter shots more consistently will open things up for us as a team."

The Bulldog seniors will strive to give Mueller help by improving on their 2006-07 totals.

McGee was the second leading scorer behind Mueller last season with 11.8 points per game, while senior point guard Julia Montebello added 6.9 points and 3.0 assists per game. Senior guards Katie Fowler and Carmen McGee contributed 6.6 and 4.1 points per game respectively last season, and they aim to build on those totals this year.

The Bulldogs will need to find some extra offense somewhere. Forward Natalie Schupbach, who averaged 10.2 points and 7.6 rebounds per game last season, graduated after four seasons with the team.

Limiting turnovers is another area in which the Bulldogs need to improve. Truman turned the ball over 18 times a game last year and had a turnover margin of -2.59. To put that into perspective, Washburn University, who won the MIAA tournament, boasted a +5.61 margin.

But Sloop said he has liked what he has seen from his team in the two exhibition games this year. He said the Bulldogs played a couple of Div. I opponents close at times. The games also were a valuable learning experience for some of his younger players.

"I was pleased with what we did," Sloop said. "We were able to figure some things out that we need to continue to work on in preparation for our first game."

Some of the younger players — including six freshmen — could have spot roles in the game plan this year.

"I think the freshmen, and not just the freshmen but those other returning players, provide us some depth ... if we get into foul trouble [or] when we get tired," Sloop said. "The deeper you are, the better the ability you have to play at a higher pace and put pressure on the other team."

Candace McGee said the freshmen constantly are trying to improve.

"The freshman class works really, really hard," she said. "I definitely think there's some girls that will get some playing time. Malorie [Kiecker], our post player — she's really strong. I think she could get some serious minutes and help us out. And then another freshman that I think could get some time is Natalie [Fleming]. She's really quick [and] a good defensive player."

The Bulldogs will look to start off their season with their fourth straight opening game win at 7:30 p.m. tonight in Moberly Mo., when they take on Central Christian College.

## Men attempt to rebuild program



Jason Williams/Index

Members of the men's basketball team scrimmage in the Student Recreation Center on Wednesday night. The men will try to overcome the loss of four seniors from last year's team.

BY BLAKE TOPPMEYER  
Assistant Sports Editor

Sixty percent of the offensive scoring is gone. A two-time All-MIAA selection is gone. Three starters and a couple of key options off the bench are gone.

But senior forward Nick Certa and junior guard Banks Estridge — the two remaining starters from the 2006-07 team — return to lead the Bulldog men's basketball team, which compiled a 16-13 record last season.

Head coach Jack Schrader said the team needs Certa and Estridge to fill some of the leadership void created when a quartet of seniors — Andy Calmes, Austin Kirby, Garrett Grimm and Grant Agbo — graduated after last season.

"Both [Estridge and Certa] have been surrounded by veterans," Schrader said. "Now they're the veterans. That casts a new light on the whole situation."

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**Jack Schrader**  
Head Coach

Schrader said he does not want his two leaders to feel the pressure of carrying the offensive load on the court.

"I think if they get in the mode where they feel they have to do more, then that's a danger to them and to the team," Schrader said. "So they just need to go out, play [and] take what comes to them."

Certa returns after earning a second-team All-MIAA selection last season while leading the Bulldogs in scoring with more than 14 points per game. He torched opponents from behind the three-point line, converting better than 45 percent of his attempts from three-point land.

Estridge said the team will look to Certa for leadership and production even more this season.

"[Certa's] always been the

kind of quiet guy," Estridge said. "He doesn't realize his potential. He doesn't realize how good he is. ... If we can get him to show up aggressive every game and just know that he's the best player out there on the court — if he can do that, he can be the best player in the conference. That's really what we need him to do to have a successful year."

Certa has been limited in practice so far this year after suffering a shoulder injury a few weeks ago but said he should be fully ready when the team opens the season against Minnesota State University-Mankato at 8 p.m. Friday at the Mankato Tip-Off Classic.

"[The injury] is pretty much cleared up now," Certa said. "So I'm getting into full practice, and hopefully I'll be 100 percent by this weekend."

Estridge will return to the point guard position after leading Truman in assists per game and steals in his first year as a starter last season. The Bulldogs ranked top in the MIAA in the assist-to-turnover ratio a year ago, largely because Estridge was tied for second in the conference in this category with nearly two assists to every turnover he committed.

"He can really kind of control the floor for us," Certa said.

Joining Estridge and Certa on the roster will be senior guard Josias Flynn, four juniors, a sophomore and six freshmen. The influx of freshmen includes four players who were named all-state at least once in their high school careers and 6-foot-10 center, Vesko Filchev, a member of the 2006 Bulgarian Junior National team.

Schrader said he is not yet

sure what kind of production he can expect from the freshman class.

"There [are] some really good days they look like world-beaters, and there [are] other days they look like freshmen," Schrader said. "So I will reserve my opinion and let the results speak for themselves."

Schrader said he doesn't have a starting lineup set for the opening tip-off and that lineups could fluctuate often in the early part of the season. He said Estridge, Flynn, sophomore guard Gabe Landau and junior forwards Patrick Fandja and Ryan Robinson have been the starters in scrimmages. But that lineup would change with the addition of a healthy Certa.

The team took a blow in August when juniors Matt Taylor and Travis Kern were suspended from the team for an off-the-court incident. Kern was one of Schrader's top options off of the bench last season. Schrader said he will evaluate if Taylor and Kern should rejoin the team at the end of this semester.

Regardless of the lineup, defense likely will play a major role in the team's success. Ranked third in the MIAA in scoring defense last year, Estridge said that facet of the game likely will take on an even greater role this season.

"[Defense] is going to be more important — it really is," Estridge said. "Especially when you don't have as many veterans, scoring is going to be a little bit harder to come by."

Schrader said the strong defensive mentality will feed into the team's overall philosophy.

"We have to adopt the personality of the type of team that makes us successful, and that's sort of your blue-collar, lunch-bucket, hard-nosed team," Schrader said. "Blue-collar, hard hat — where does that start? Defense."

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