

Football wins in shootout at SBU

BY BLAKE TOPPMEYER
Assistant Sports Editor

Sometimes numbers do lie. The Truman football team was outperformed last Saturday in almost every statistical category, including total yards, time of possession and turnover margin, but had the advantage in the numbers that count most — the final score.

Despite being outgained by Southwest Baptist University by almost 300 yards, the Bulldogs (4-2, 2-2) claimed their second straight conference win, beating the Bearcats 55-31.

"There [are] a lot of things we can improve on, obviously, but the No. 1 thing is we got a road win, and last time we were there, we lost," head coach Shannon Currier said.

Southwest Baptist compiled 702 yards of total offense and had 41 first downs — both team highs since the school began recording its statistics in 2002 — compared with the 'Dogs' 403 yards of total offense and 21 first downs.

But Truman's defense limited the Bearcats, who now have lost

11 straight games and 17 of their last 18, to five successful scores in eight red zone opportunities. The Bulldogs rank fourth in the MIAA in red zone defense.

"We just have to stay strong in the red zone, basically," said sophomore linebacker Kyle Supianoski, who led the team in total tackles for the third consecutive game. "... Kind of a philosophy we have is to not let them get in the end zone. As long as we can keep them from putting points on the board, that's all that matters, I suppose."

Twice the Bulldogs defense turned Bearcat scoring opportunities into touchdowns of their own. Senior defensive back James Thabuteau blocked a second-quarter field goal attempt, and after scooping up the football, he raced 91 yards for a touchdown. Had Southwest Baptist's Greg Downey converted the field goal, it would have narrowed the Bulldog lead to 14-10. Instead, Thabuteau's score placed the Bulldogs ahead 21-7.

"The momentum of the game just totally [shifted] from their side to our side," sophomore linebacker Eric Sternberg said. "When they're on a huge drive

and we go out and stop them ... and take it for a score, that just takes the wind right out of a team. So I think the momentum boost just totally shifted 100 percent our way."

Sternberg added the second defensive score on the final play of the game when he returned an interception 98 yards for a touchdown.

The two defensive touchdowns helped Truman maintain consistent scoring output throughout the game. The purple and white scored two touchdowns in each quarter.

Junior quarterback Matt Ticich opened the scoring midway through the first quarter with a 41-yard touchdown run. Ticich's score came on a fourth-and-one play, but Currier said he did not hesitate to gamble and go for the first down instead of punting the football.

"They just didn't have a very good run support system against the no-backs thing that we're doing," Currier said. "... Fortunately everybody made their block, and it ended up being a good play."

After the initial touchdown from Ticich, who added another



Nathan Becker/Index
Freshman running back Anton Bernard tackles a Fort Hays player for a safety during a game earlier this fall. The Bulldogs improved their record to 4-2 with Saturday's win at SBU.

rushing touchdown and three passing touchdowns later in the game, the Bulldogs led for the remainder of the game.

The closest Southwest Baptist came to tying the score or taking the lead came in the second quarter after the Bearcats scored on two consecutive possessions to cut the 'Dogs' lead to 21-19. But the Bulldogs scored 21 points unanswered, and this, coupled with the defense holding Southwest Baptist scoreless in the third quarter, closed the door on the Bearcats.

Including the last two quarters of Truman's Sept. 30 win against Fort Hays State University, the Bulldogs have scored 81 points in their last six quarters of play. The team scored a total of

just 13 points in its first 10 quarters of MIAA play.

On Saturday, the offense received a boost from its running game. Three Bulldog running backs plus Ticich helped the 'Dogs' post 146 yards on the ground. It was the most running yards the Bulldogs have had in a game since its season-opening victory against the University of Missouri-Rolla.

Ticich completed more than 50 percent of his passes for the fifth time this season. He totaled 257 passing yards on 27 completions.

The Bearcats entered the game first in the conference in passing yardage but came in averaging just 61 rushing yards per game. Southwest Baptist found

better balance against the 'Dogs, with 259 yards rushing and 443 yards passing.

"They're a passing team, so we tried a lot of three-man rushes," Currier said. "And when we did that, we were giving up some running game opportunities."

Southwest Baptist ran a total of 125 plays from scrimmage, a major factor in its accumulating the big offensive statistics.

"An average game is usually 60 to 70 plays," Supianoski said. "So there was almost two games, basically, in one. So I think that had a lot to do with it."

The Bulldogs will host Pittsburg State University (4-2) at 2 p.m. Saturday and try to extend their winning streak to three straight.

Bulldogs get flagged down in win against 'Cats

BY BLAKE TOPPMEYER
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Yellow laundry littered the field Saturday at Plaster Stadium.

In the Truman football team's 55-31 victory at Southwest Baptist University, the two teams were flagged a total of 32 times. Fifteen penalties were assessed on the Bulldogs for a total of 139 yards.

Of the 15 Truman penalties, four were unsportsmanlike conducts, and two were personal fouls.

"If there was any disappointment on the day, it would be that we didn't play with the class that we want to be playing with," head coach Shannon Currier said. "We had too many penalties."

The Bulldogs have been penalized 55 times this season for 441 yards. Southwest Baptist

is the only team in the MIAA to have more penalties or more penalty yardage than the 'Dogs. The conference average is 43 penalties for 357 yards.

Through six games this season, the Bulldogs have been flagged for six unsportsmanlike conducts and eight personal fouls.

"We're happy that we got the win [Saturday], but we all feel that we need to make some changes about how we go about winning and eliminate a lot of the penalties that we had, some of the not-smart penalties," sophomore linebacker Eric Sternberg said.

Sophomore linebacker Kyle Supianoski said he thinks unsportsmanlike conducts and personal fouls can result from high intensity and not necessarily a lack of discipline.

"People get pretty passionate

out there on the football [field] and, in the heat of the moment, maybe do something they might regret later," said Supianoski, who was flagged for a personal foul and unsportsmanlike conduct Saturday.

Sternberg said that sometimes when the Bulldogs were flagged for a personal foul or unsportsmanlike conduct Saturday, it came in retaliation for something a Bearcat player had done. But he said the Bulldogs need to try to control their emotions in future games.

"I know it's really hard to do — when someone pushes you from behind or gets in your face after a play — to hold back," Sternberg said. "But I think we need to just walk away from those situations and just let the refs handle it. And if they don't see it, then they'll catch it the next time."

Not every Bulldog unsportsmanlike conduct or personal foul occurred in a confrontation with a Bearcat player. The Bulldogs received a 15-yard penalty when senior defensive back James Thabuteau was flagged for excessive celebration during his 91-yard touchdown return of a blocked field goal.

Currier said penalties such as these are disappointing but that he understands penalties can occur during an important play such as a blocked field goal.

"James was raising his hands as he went into the end zone," Currier said. "[He was] excited, but nonetheless, you can't draw attention to yourself in the college game, and he did."

So far this season, Truman's high penalty rate has not had a direct effect on the outcome of the game. In the Bulldogs' two most penalized games — Sat-

urday's win against Southwest Baptist and their Sept. 8 win against Upper Iowa University — they have won by a combined margin of 48 points.

Part of this can be attributed to the high rate at which the Bulldogs' opponents have been penalized. Opposing teams have been flagged a total of 54 times in their matchups with Truman.

But Currier said his team can't afford to be penalized as many times as it was against the Bearcats.

"We're definitely going to resolve some of those things so we don't have those [penalties] because, against a good team or if it's a close game, obviously we're not going to be able to find victory if we're having too many fouls," Currier said.

The officiating crew in Saturday's game against Southwest Baptist was the same unit that

refereed the game against Upper Iowa. In that contest, the Bulldogs were penalized 15 times, including one unsportsmanlike conduct and four personal fouls, and the Peacocks were flagged 12 times. In games not refereed by that officiating crew, the 'Dogs have averaged just six penalties per game.

This Saturday, the Bulldogs will host Pittsburg State University, a team which is on the opposite end of the spectrum when it comes to penalties. The Gorillas have been penalized for 205 yards this season, the fewest of any school in the MIAA.

"We didn't play as clean of a game as we need to play [Saturday]," Currier said. "We retaliated at times when we shouldn't have retaliated, and that's something that we're definitely addressing and going to get corrected."

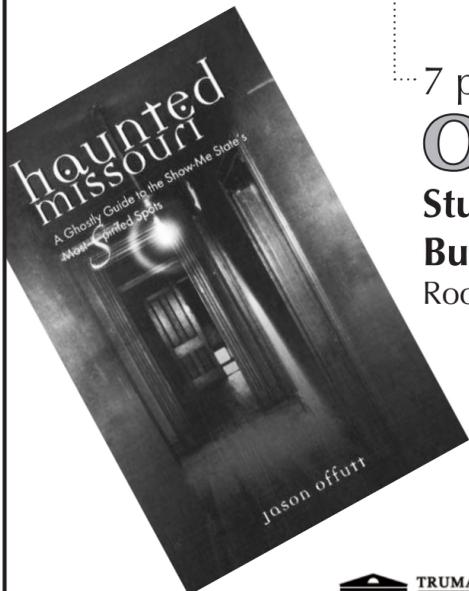
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