



Nathan Becker/Index

Junior outside hitter Eli Medina and freshman setter Ashley Petak discuss strategy during the volleyball team's Saturday sweep of Northwest Missouri. The Bulldogs loss on Tuesday to SIUE dropped their record to 26-5.

STREAK | Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville ends team's 16-game unbeaten run

Continued from Page 15

Cherven led the 'Dogs with a .400 hitting percentage. Freshman setter Ashley Petak had 23 assists.

As the Bulldogs prepare for the stretch run, Skoch said he

knows the routine won't change a whole lot.

"We are going to make sure that we stay fundamental," Skoch said. "There was some poor footwork yesterday and some other stuff, so yes, we are going to

change a little. But there was some stuff that we did at Northwest Saturday that is stuff we had been working on directly in practice, so I don't want to quit that."

Truman has a tough stretch of matches coming up, beginning

Friday when it hosts MIAA rival Southwest Baptist University at Pershing. On Saturday the 'Dogs host No. 11 Augustana College (S.D.) before a rematch with No. 9 University of Central Missouri on Wednesday.

VOLLEYBALL | Defense propels Bulldogs to 26-5 records and No. 6 national ranking

Continued from Page 15

to dig as many balls. ... We had some really good defensive scrambles, and the team is responding well."

The Bulldogs have been holding their opponents to very low hitting percentages lately. On Saturday, Northwest Missouri State University hit -.183 in the second game on

its way to a -.015 hitting percentage for the match. To put the figures into perspective, Truman has not had a negative hitting percentage for a match since at least 1997.

Additionally, the Bearcats had the same number of players in the red as they did on the positive side.

The Bulldog defense will have a tough

task on hand next Wednesday when the team hosts the University of Central Missouri. UCM comes into the game second in the MIAA in hitting percentage at .268, only .002 behind conference leader Washburn University. In the first match between the two, Truman limited UCM to a .179 hitting percentage, well below its average of .268.

FOOTBALL | Washburn racks up more than 400 rushing yards in 71-35 victory

Continued from Page 15

The Ichabods had three different running backs eclipse the 100-yard rushing plateau. Junior Brandon Walker was the most potent of the trio. He rushed for four touchdowns.

"We didn't fit appropriately on a lot of the run plays that Washburn ran with their two tight end formations, and therefore they were able to get decent running yards against us," Currier said.

The Bulldog offense posted big numbers despite the defeat. A week after being shut out and held to fewer than 250 yards of total offense by Pittsburg State University, the 'Dogs responded with 486 yards against the Ichabods.

Junior quarterback Matt Ticich led the way on a day when the wind gusts reached 25 mph. Ticich tossed five touchdown passes, the most for a Bulldog quarterback since Jake Czeschin set the Truman record with six touchdown passes Oct. 30, 2004. Ticich's five touchdown passes were among his 21 completions in 40 attempts for 280 passing yards.

"You know that [Ticich] is going to get the ball out quick and give an ample opportunity for us to make the catch, and he's going to usually hit you in stride, so you can do something after the catch," said Bemby, who totaled 42 receiving yards and 30 rushing yards.

Eight different Bulldogs caught a pass, and a quartet of sophomores — Vanness Emokpae, Phil Kenney, Steve D'Antonio and Marvin Bemby — tallied at least four receptions each.

Kenney, who normally plays running back, provided support for the Bulldogs' receiving corps with juniors Tyler Fenton and Phillip Henry unavailable because of injuries. Kenney had four receptions, two touchdowns and 99 receiving yards, which led the team.

The running game also pro-

vided a boost for the Bulldogs. Senior running back Jake Cunningham compiled 67 yards on 10 carries, and Ticich chipped in an additional 62 yards.

The 179 rushing yards were the most the Bulldogs have accumulated since they ran for more than 300 yards in their Week 1 victory against the University of Missouri-Rolla.

But with the Bulldogs' offensive success came four turnovers, the most they have had in a game this season. Ticich threw two interceptions, making it four straight weeks he has thrown at least one pick after having a streak of 188 consecutive passes without an interception snapped earlier this season. The Bulldogs have committed 10 turnovers in their last three games.

The Ichabods capitalized on the 'Dogs' mistakes. Washburn scored 21 of its points on drives following a Truman turnover. The two interceptions set up a pair of Ichabod scoring drives of 31 and 11 yards, respectively.

Because it had an average starting field position at the Truman 49-yard line in the quarter, Washburn scored its five second-quarter touchdowns despite possessing the ball for less than five minutes in the entire quarter.

"I really feel like [the defense has] been completely confident and prepared going into every single game at the beginning of the game," defensive coordinator Wallie Kuchinski said. "And then for some odd reason, we ended up having some kind of a breakdown."

The Bulldogs will host Emporia State University (3-5) 2 p.m. Saturday at Stokes Stadium. The 'Dogs have not been below the .500 mark this season and have a chance to keep that streak alive against a Hornet team which has just one MIAA victory and is mired in a five-game losing streak.



Jackson Groves/Index

Pittsburg State quarterback Mark Smith makes his way through a running lane in the Gorillas' Oct. 13 victory against the Bulldogs. Truman's run defense allowed more than 400 yards rushing Saturday at Washburn and ranks last in the conference.

DEFENSE | Season-long struggle against the run shows up in team's loss to Washburn

Continued from Page 15

"You can't worry about if the guy next to you is going to make a play or not," Hamers said. "You have to know he is."

The Bulldogs' struggles come a year after the defense was a key force in the team, winning six games last season. In 2006, the defense allowed less than 26 points per game and limited opponents to 128 yards rushing per game.

Opponents averaged just 3.5 yards per carry last season, but that number has climbed to 5.1 yards per carry this year. With three games still to play, the 'Dogs already have surrendered more rushing yards and more yards of total offense than they did in all of 2006.

Although the Bulldogs did graduate two second team All-MIAA players — linebacker Darryl Reddick and cornerback Josh Mayson — from last season's squad, the defense

returned six of its top eight leading tacklers from 2006.

But the Bulldogs have just two seniors — safety Jesse Cooper and cornerback James Thabuteau — on the defensive side of the football, which head coach Shannon Currier said might be contributing to the team's defensive woes.

"The other thing we have to find a way to do is continue to improve our leadership," Currier said. "When you don't have a very [big] senior class, I guess that's always a concern. ... Some of the chemistry, like leadership and intangible things, [comes] into play."

The play of the special teams and offense also could be contributing to the Bulldogs' defensive struggles. Truman ranks ninth in the MIAA in net punting average, which often leads to good starting field position

for the 'Dogs' opponents. In the Washburn game, the Ichabods had a 10-yard advantage in average field position to begin a drive.

Offensively, the Bulldogs feature an up-tempo, pass-oriented offense. This has led to Truman ranking sixth in the conference in total offense but has subjected the team's defense to being on the field more often.

The defense has been forced to defend 652 plays this season, 37 more plays than the next closest MIAA school and almost 100 plays more than the conference average of the nine MIAA schools who have played eight games.

The defense will have the chance to improve its performance Saturday, when the 'Dogs compete against Emporia State University. The Hornets are last in the conference in scoring offense and seventh in rushing offense.

PLAYOFFS | Volleyball and women's soccer primed for postseason appearance

Continued from Page 15

run and shocking a few teams. I think it will go farther than last year's squad in the postseason.

Football: Barring a miracle, this team is done. The only way this team has any chance of sniffing the playoffs is if it wins out and Missouri Western State University, Pittsburg State University, UCM and Missouri Southern State University all lose out. Maybe — maybe then the Bulldogs can sneak into the Mineral Water Bowl.

Now this is going to be really tough, especially with UCM playing Mo. West on Nov. 3.

This team continues to baffle me. I really thought it was better than 4-4 and 2-4 in the MIAA.

Coming into the season I thought the offense would struggle, and the defense would have to bail it out. Now it looks as if I had it backwards. It appears that the only way the Bulldogs can win is if the 'O' wins a barnburner because right now the defense can't stop anyone.

I really don't understand the defense's complete ineffectiveness. Last year it was a bright spot, and this year — with so many players returning — it has had games where it has given up 71, 53 and 40 points. Plus, the defense gave up 680 yards of offense to Southwest Baptist University.

Prediction: Done.

Men's soccer: I don't care what happens the rest of this season — in my mind this year has been a success. Yes, it appears that a playoff appearance is unlikely for the men — espe-

cially considering their 0-6 region record.

I really didn't think this team would be good enough to even sniff a postseason berth. The team has played really well this year and, with only two seniors departing, looks to be even better next year. I think the men are a year away.

Prediction: No postseason, but 2008 looks like it could be a very good year.

Women's soccer: I know it's the players who play the game, but how about a hand for head coach Mike Cannon. He has been the head coach since 1993 and has captured seven MIAA titles and made five NCAA tournaments. He has helped build a soccer program that competes year after year.

This year is no different. The women are 12-4-1 for the year and 9-2-1 in the MIAA. They sit alone atop the conference and have already clinched a spot in the MIAA postseason tournament.

I honestly have no idea how far this team can go in the postseason. But, they are playing really well right now. I know if they can get some home games for postseason play — look out. The team is 7-0-1 on its home pitch.

Prediction: MIAA champions and at least one win in the NCAA tournament.

Now, please understand, these predictions are for entertainment purposes only. I am notorious for getting things like this wrong: Last weekend I thought the New England Patriots were going to lose to the Miami Dolphins.

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