



Jackson Groves/Index
 Junior quarterback Matt Ticich gets set to fire a pass downfield during the Bulldogs' 26-11 victory against Fort Hays State University on Saturday at Stokes Stadium. Ticich led the Bulldogs to their third win of the season and first win in the MIAA with a 33-53 passing performance for 374 yards and one touchdown.

Football topples Tigers for third win

BY BLAKE TOPPMEYER
 Assistant Sports Editor

After nearly three quarters of offensive futility, the Truman football team turned to trickery.

Knotted in a 3-3 deadlock with Fort Hays State University on Saturday night, the 'Dogs executed a double pass for the go-ahead touchdown. Junior quarterback Matt Ticich tossed a lateral to redshirt freshman backup quarterback Phillip Davis, who threw across the field, finding senior running back Jake Cunningham wide open in the right corner of the end zone for a 26-yard score.

"All during our planning for the game, we were seeing their safeties crashing down," Davis said. "So we knew that play — which Cunningham ran around the backfield there — would work."

Davis' touchdown pass gave the 'Dogs their first lead of the game, which they would never relinquish. The Bulldogs (3-2, 1-2) won their MIAA home opener 26-11, snapping a two-game losing skid.

Ticich said that after watching Davis run the play in practice last week, he was confident Davis would make an accurate pass.

"We practiced that play all week long," Ticich said. "All week long Phil had been hitting the back in stride, and coach was like, 'Let's go out there, and let's run it.' And he made a terrific throw, and Jake made a great catch, and it truly turned the tide of the game."

The double pass touchdown came on the heels of a standout play by Truman's special teams. Junior defensive end Les Hammers and senior defensive back James Thabuteau tackled Fort Hays' punter Tyler Elder before he could get his kick away. This gave the Bulldogs field position at the Tigers' 26-yard line and set the stage for Davis' heroics.

The two-play swing awakened a slumbering offense. Ticich completed 11 of 14 pass attempts in the fourth quarter and engineered two touchdown drives.

The defense, which held Fort Hays to 229 yards of total offense, added a safety when Fort Hays had to punt from deep within their own territory, and the ball was snapped over Elder's head and recovered by the Tigers in the end zone.

Davis said the team seemed revived after his third-quarter touchdown pass.

"The crowd got more hyped, [and] every-

body on offense, defense and special teams were just ready to play, ready to get after it after we made that touchdown pass," he said.

The Bulldogs recorded 505 yards of total offense, the second time they have eclipsed the 500-yard mark this season. Ticich accounted for almost 400 yards of offense, with 374 yards passing and another 25 yards on the ground. He completed 33 of 53 pass attempts but saw his streak of 188 consecutive passes without an interception snapped in the second quarter when Jason Carr grabbed the first of his two interceptions.

Even with all the offensive yards, the Bulldogs were kept off the scoreboard until sophomore kicker Mickey Masucci tied the game 3-3 with a 22-yard field goal with 1:18 remaining in the third quarter.

Seven dropped passes by Bulldog receivers played a role in the 'Dogs not scoring until late in the third quarter, but Truman's defense kept the team in the game until the offense found a rhythm. The defense surrendered just 41 rushing yards and held Fort Hays to an 18 percent third down conversion rate. The defense did not allow a first down on eight different Tiger possessions.

Junior nose tackle Andy Swedenhjelm said limiting first down yardage was the key to keeping Fort Hays from gaining first downs.

"The first play is the most important play," Swedenhjelm said. "Because when they have second and long, third and long, we know what they're going to do. We know they're going to try to pass it on us."

Thrice the defense endured difficult field position to take a shutout into halftime. Fort Hays had two drives starting in Truman territory and another beginning at its own 46 yard line, but the closest they came to scoring was a 47-yard missed field goal by Justin Barr.

"Our defense was playing outstanding," head coach Shannon Currier said. "Obviously that kept us in the game and kept the momentum at bay until somebody could make a play [offensively]."

The Tigers were held scoreless until Barr split the uprights with a 35-yard field goal to put Fort Hays ahead 3-0 with 4:57 to play in the third quarter.

The Bulldogs' defensive line was vital to the defensive effort. Junior defensive linemen Richard Schroeder, Hammers and Swedenhjelm combined for 17 total tackles, 4 1/2 tackles for a loss, and 2 1/2 sacks. The linemen also were

a major factor in holding Fort Hays to an average of fewer than 1 1/2 yards per rushing attempt.

"We got a lot of penetration," Currier said. "When your up-front guys are making plays, that's awesome. If you can dominate up front, then the rest of the defense, it's a lot easier to play. But if your guys are getting blocked up front, then all of a sudden your second-level guys have to make plays in space, and that's more difficult."

The defensive penetration helped the secondary limit Tiger quarterbacks to just a 41 percent completion rate.

"Our game plan [Saturday] was to really pressure the quarterback and stop the run," Thabuteau said. "Once we got that done, they kind of went to their pass game, which is not their strong point."

After allowing 80 points in two MIAA games previous to Saturday's win, Thabuteau said the defense wanted to rebound against a Fort Hays team which came into the contest averaging more than 31 points per game.

"We just knew that this was a turning point game for us, after going 0-2 in the first two games in the conference," Thabuteau said. "So we knew we had to come out here and make a statement."

'Dogs thrive at Stokes

BY BLAKE TOPPMEYER
 Assistant Sports Editor

For the Truman football team, there truly is no place like home.

The Bulldogs' 26-11 victory Saturday night against Fort Hays State University extended the purple and white's winning streak at Stokes Stadium to six in a row, dating back to last season. Since the beginning of the 2006 season, the 'Dogs are 6-1 in home games.

"There is a lot of home field advantage, I think, throughout the league because it's so competitive," head coach Shannon Currier said. "There is a lot of parity. You have to win your home games, and you have to win enough games on the road to knock teams off. But for some reason, that momentum is easier to get when you're at home."

The 6-1 home record in the last year and a half is in sharp contrast to what Bulldog teams accomplished in Currier's first two years at the helm. From 2004-05, the 'Dogs compiled a 2-8 record at Stokes to accompa-

ny a 2-10 record in road games.

But beginning last season, the Bulldogs turned their home field into an advantage. They were 4-2 in home games in 2006 and are 2-0 this season.

Junior nose tackle Andy Swedenhjelm said playing in front of the fans at Stokes Stadium gives the team a boost.

"Like [Saturday] night, we had a great crowd behind us, and that just energizes us," Swedenhjelm said. "We love it when we get great support. We love being here at home. It's a comfortable atmosphere."

Although Stokes Stadium has transformed into a safe haven for the Bulldogs, the team still hasn't solved its road woes. After going 2-4 on the road last season, the 'Dogs are 1-2 in road games this year.

And it's not just the record illustrating the difference between home and road performance. Since the beginning of 2006, the offense is averaging almost 31 points a game at Stokes compared to just more than 18 points a game on the road. The defense follows suit, allowing fewer than 23 points a game at home but

more than 31 points a game in opposing stadiums.

"It's great to play at home, but if we want to be one of the better teams in this conference we have to start winning on the road," junior quarterback Matt Ticich said.

Currier said the Bulldogs' lack of experience — the team has just four seniors on the roster — might be exposed more in games played in tough environments away from Stokes.

"I think we're doing a lot of things it takes to get prepared for road games," Currier said. "Our players do a good job of acting like it's a business trip. They're mature. ... We don't lose any concentration. It's matter of just getting our confidence, expecting to win every game. That just takes wins to get to that stage."

Although most MIAA schools perform better on their home surfaces, the difference is not nearly as vast as the Bulldogs'. Missouri Southern State University, a team which has the same record as the 'Dogs since the start of the 2006 season, has a 5-4 home record and 4-3 road record in the last year and a half. During that same



Jackson Groves/Index
 Several members of the Bulldog faithful cheer on the team during Saturday's game against Fort Hays State. Dating back to last season, the 'Dogs have won six straight home games.

time span, Washburn University is an equal 5-3 at home and 5-3 on the road.

After opening the season with three of five contests away from Kirksville, the Bulldogs have three home games and three road contests left in 2007.

"There's surely a lot of potential yet to win a lot of games on

the road this year," Currier said. "They'll be more difficult. They always are."

The Bulldogs will have a good opportunity for a road victory Saturday at Southwest Baptist University, a team that is winless this season. The 'Dogs' next game at Stokes will be Oct. 13 against Pitts-

burg State University at 2 p.m. "Looking at our schedule, I think we're going to pick it up," sophomore kicker Mickey Masucci said. "We already played the two toughest teams in our conference, so I'm thinking we're going to have a real successful season from here on out."

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The Center for Student Involvement (CSI) reminds all student organizations that their Banner Rosters are due **October 31, 2007**. Banner Roster's can be submitted to the CSI via email to csioster@truman.edu.

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