

'Dogs fall on road to UCM

Football suffers first loss of season 27-7 to UCM, drops to 0-1 in conference play

BY BLAKE TOPPMEYER
Assistant Sports Editor

The Bulldogs couldn't move the chains.

Locked in a 7-7 tie early in the fourth quarter at the University of Central Missouri, the Truman football team failed to get a first down for the second consecutive drive and was forced to punt from its own territory.

Central's Anthony Parks had a 20-yard return on sophomore Mickey Masucci's 27-yard punt, and after a Bulldog penalty and three offensive plays, the Mules had a 14-7 lead.

Truman went its next four offensive drives without a first down — making it six drives in a row — and Central tacked on two more touchdowns en route to its 27-7 victory against the Bulldogs (2-1) in Saturday's MIAA opener. "[Central's] talent is way better than what we'd seen," head coach Shannon Currier said. "They have a very good defense. They have a lot of speed and size, so a lot of credit goes to them. ... We just didn't connect on a big play to create any momentum swing."

After posting 93 points and 1,110 offensive yards in two non-conference wins, the Bulldogs were limited to just 160 yards of total offense and a third-quarter touchdown against the Mules (2-1).

"Their defense played very well and were much more physical and aggressive than we were on offense," Currier said. "We didn't block real well, we didn't throw the ball real well and we just didn't get off jams as receivers real well. ... One hundred sixty yards of offense is just not going to allow us to win games."

The Mules' defense proved its aptitude in shutting down the running game. The unit had allowed just six total rushing yards in the two games prior to Saturday, and the Bulldogs managed just 50 yards on the ground.

"They were big up front, and it seemed like they were getting a lot of pressure up front," said senior running back Jake Cunningham, who led all Bulldog ball carriers with 34 yards on 14 rushes.

The Bulldogs eventually abandoned any attempt at mounting a rushing attack. Junior quarterback Matt Ticich dropped back to pass on the first 12 plays of the fourth quarter.

Cunningham said he didn't question the coaching staff's decision to move strictly to a passing attack in the final quarter, but he said the passing-only strategy was not successful.

"Even though the game was tied 7-7 in the fourth quarter, it seemed like we were playing ... from behind," Cunningham said. "We were passing a lot, and with the penetration they were getting, it just didn't seem to be real effective."

The Mules limited Ticich to 110 yards passing and a 39 percent completion rate a week after Ticich set a school and conference record for most passing yards in a single game. Central sacked Ticich four times and often blitzed the Bulldog quarterback on third down, causing Ticich to hurry some passes.

"They just were able to ... force some pressure on our quarterback, which obviously makes it difficult for him to complete balls down the field, or we don't get the time to run routes at the depth we need to run them to get first downs," Currier said. "Bottom line was, they just brought more



Jackson Groves/Index
Senior running back Jake Cunningham carries the ball downfield during the team's home opener against Upper Iowa. Cunningham carried the ball just 14 times for 34 yards in the team's 27-7 loss to UCM last Saturday.

pressure than we could pick up." While the offense struggled, the defense kept the Bulldogs close through three quarters.

The Mules scored with 3:37 remaining in the first quarter, but from there Central was kept scoreless until they broke the game open in the last 15 minutes of play.

The initial Mule touchdown drive appeared to be halted when junior Garrett Feig intercepted Eric Czerniewski's pass. But a roughing-the-passer penalty kept the drive alive, and Central's Glenn Milner capitalized on the penalty with a 13-yard touchdown run.

Central compiled 345 yards of total offense, including 198 rushing yards, but the 'Dogs were able

to minimize the damage by forcing three turnovers and twice limiting the Mules to a field goal attempt— both of which were missed.

"I think a lot of it was our focus when times got rough," senior nose tackle Andy Swedehjelm said. "We didn't let any big plays get us down or didn't let any bad spots get us down. We just maintained our focus and kept our assignments going."

Senior defensive back Jesse Cooper (10 total tackles), junior linebacker Michael Phillips (10 total tackles) and sophomore linebacker Kyle Supianoski (six total tackles, two sacks) led the Bulldogs' defense.

The Bulldogs utilized a turnover opportunity for their only score of

the game. Supianoski sacked Czerniewski, forcing a fumble, and junior defensive end Richard Schroeder pounced on the football, giving the 'Dogs possession at the Mules 17-yard line. From there, it took Ticich just two plays to find junior tight end Ryan King for a 12-yard touchdown pass, tying the game with 13:11 remaining in the third quarter.

But the Bulldogs crossed midfield just one more time in the game, and the Mules took advantage of their starting field position. Two of Central's three fourth-quarter touchdowns came on scoring drives of just 29 yards.

"We were worse offensively in the fourth quarter than we were any other quarter of the game," Currier said.

Mizzou tops Bulls 26-8

Tigers beat men for the third straight time, team now 1-1 on the season

BY BEN YARNELL
Staff Reporter

Rugby is a game of hitting. Last weekend, the men's team took its first hit in the loss column.

The Bulls took on the University of Missouri Tigers in Columbia, Mo., and lost 26-8. The loss dropped the Bulls to 1-1 on the season Saturday.

Head coach Bill Sexton said changes were made between games, but not to the level that was needed.

"We showed big improvement over last weekend with [St. Louis University], but the step up in the competition was significantly greater this week," Sexton said. "They were better on capitalizing on their opportunities than we were."

The game started out to Truman's favor when junior Will Holleman made a penalty kick early in the first period. Mizzou was quick to answer back with two tries in the course of 10 minutes. The Tigers converted one of the tries to bring the score at halftime to 12-3.

In the second half, Truman was able to tack on a try of their own by junior Dustin Ralph. The try was the second of the season for Ralph, the only Bull to score any tries for the team.

Mizzou responded to Ralph's try with two converted tries of its own to bring the match to a final score of 26-8.

The loss marks the third straight for the Bulls at the hands of the Tigers.

Sexton said one of the reasons his squad struggled was a few of the players had never seen Mizzou's kicking-heavy style of play.

"We have a very young back three who don't have a whole lot of experience," Sexton said. "They got put under pressure with kicked balls, and some scoring opportunities for Mizzou were facilitated by naive decisions close to the goal line."

Despite the loss, Sexton said there are a lot of positives that came out of this match.

"I thought our fitness was a lot better," Sexton said. "Against SLU, we played only 30-minute periods, but against Mizzou, we played 40 minutes. I thought the guys played at a higher level longer than last week."

Other obstacles for Truman last weekend were injuries to two veteran players. Junior Alex Koenen injured his calf after two Mizzou players tackled him.

"I thought I had broken it initially because I couldn't walk," Koenen said. "Apparently I just tore some muscles in my calf. ... It was too swollen for [the emergency room doctor] to tell after the game."

Another injured veteran was team captain Justin Lacy. The junior received a concussion after he hit his head in a ruck with 10 minutes left in the game.

The concussion is Lacy's fourth. He said that because he has had so many, he

is going to have to evaluate his options carefully after this.

"I've got to be thinking a little bit about the future, so we will see," Lacy said.

He is sure that both he and Koenen will not see action next weekend when the Bulls travel to St. Louis to take on the St. Louis Bombers' B-side team. He said he is not worried about the team playing without its captain.

"We have a great team, and we have all been working hard," Lacy said. "They don't need me."

Sexton said that of the three games leading up to the Bulls' first league match, this is the one he does not expect to win.

The Bombers are the only men's club team on the Bulls' schedule this fall. Among other accomplishments, one of the Bombers' players is playing for the U.S. team at this year's Rugby World Cup.

"I fully expect the Bombers' B-side to be a better team than Mizzou," Sexton said. "It is a game that we shouldn't win unless we just play out of our minds."

The Bulls' head coach went on to say that although the game is an expected loss, they plan to use the experience to its fullest advantage.

"That game is going to be like a really, really hard practice," Sexton said. "Guys are going to be pressured and pushed to their limit to continue to focus and play. That's what we want. We want to be pushed to a new limit."



Jason Williams/Index
Members of the Bulls rugby team vie for a throw in during a game last season. The Bulls lost their first game of the season last weekend 26-8.

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